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CAUGHT BETWEEN CULTURES

**A STUDY OF FACTORS INFLUENCING ISRAELI PARENTS'
DECISIONS TO ENROL THEIR CHILDREN AT AN
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL**

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INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Submitted by Rosalyn Ezra
For the degree of EdD
From the University of Bath
2006

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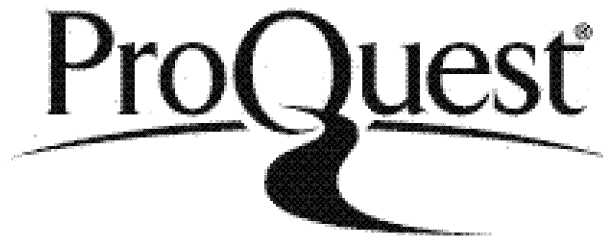
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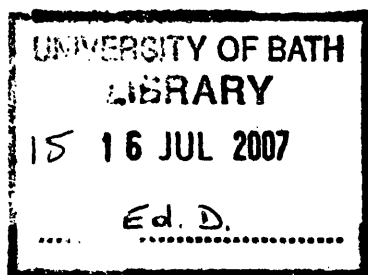
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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the 'lights of my life' - Yarden, Becky and Amit.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors Israeli parents perceived as important influences impacting upon their decisions to enrol their children in an American international school in Israel. A survey was administered to parents designated as Israeli citizens by school admissions records. The survey was utilized to acquire background information and to identify potential participants for personal interviews in order to probe more deeply into underlying issues alluded to in the survey. The survey and interviews were analyzed using the Push/Pull Model adapted from migration theory and Rational Choice Theory. Findings of the survey revealed that a desire for an English language education and small classes were paramount factors affecting Israeli parental school choice decisions, while the happiness and well-being of their children at school were essential considerations. Three groups of parents were identified for interviews: Russian speakers, native born Israelis and other language speakers. Analysis of the interviews revealed that Russian speaking parents perceived a weak curriculum, lack of adequate teacher preparation and poor discipline in classes as major push factors drawing them away from local schools to a private international school. Native born Israeli parents articulated inadequate administrative responses to violence or potentially violent incidences among students, and the inability or unwillingness of teachers to address the individual academic needs of their children as major impetuses away from local schools. For both groups, the private nature of the international school and its small classes were viewed as positive pull factors. In interviews, an English language education was not voiced as a main concern but was looked upon as a future benefit for their children's success in a global context. Local parents in the third group, other language speakers, expressed curricular concerns and the happiness of their children in school as major push and pull determinants. Cultural values inculcated during childhood and transferred from countries of origin conflicted with local values, playing significant roles in local parental views about the Israeli education system.

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GLOSSARY

Advanced Placement Tests – Content area examinations administered during high school to qualified participants enabling successful students to receive university credit

Bagrut exams - Israeli matriculation exams given in various subjects during the last two years of high school which are similar to British A-Levels

Content-based schools – schools similar to American magnet schools that focus on distinct content areas

Dovrat Plan – an education reform plan initiated by the Israel Ministry of Education to address the ills of the public education system

Effective schools – A. Schools reflecting high academic outcomes as measured by standardized tests. B. Schools possessing particular characteristics as small class populations, highly qualified teachers and administrators, a challenging curriculum, parental involvement in school matters and personalized attention to specific student needs. C. Schools in which students make sufficient academic progress from their initial starting points

Efficient schools – schools that perform in the best possible manner to achieve desired results

Elementary school – a primary school serving children from the ages of five through eleven, American grades kindergarten through grade five

Enculturation – The process of assimilating the values and practices of a new culture.

Every Child Matters: Change for Children – A British governmental green paper published in 2003 focusing on improving the conditions of children and protecting their rights, including access to improved education opportunities

External high schools – privately owned schools concentrating on preparing students for final matriculation exams similar to 'crammer' schools in the U.K.

Fourth Culture Kids – Children of host country citizens who attend international schools in their own country. These children often feel estranged from their home culture and often lose proficiency in their mother tongue.

High school – A school serving children from American grades nine through twelve, ages fourteen through eighteen

International Baccalaureate Diploma Program - A rigorous international trans-disciplinary program administered by the International Baccalaureate Organisation to member schools during the final two years of high school. The program culminates with major exams

Law of Return – An official Israeli law guaranteeing all Jews throughout the world the right of Israeli citizenship upon immigrating to Israel

Local Israeli parents - Native born or immigrant parents who possess citizenship and reside in Israel

Michina – A university preparatory course -of one year's duration designed for students needing to complete matriculation exams or to increase their scores for university acceptance

Middle school – a school serving children from American grades six through eight, ages eleven to thirteen

No Child Left Behind Act – A United States education reform act initiated to equalise educational opportunities for all children

Returning residents – Israeli citizens and their children who have sojourned abroad for several years and have returned to reside permanently in Israel

Semi-private schools – Schools presenting the national curriculum of Israel under the auspices of the Ministry of Education that represent specific ideologies or concentrate on certain subject areas but are permitted to charge extra yearly tuition fees.

Tali schools – Ideologically motivated schools representing a traditional Jewish philosophy that is more liberal in outlook than orthodox religious schools.

Third Culture Kids – A phrase coined by Pollack and Van Reken (1999) in their book of that title to describe children who move from international school to international school and rarely spend time in their countries of nationality. These children often feel a lack of connection to any particular country or often feel estranged from their countries of nationality

TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) - An international survey administered in 1995, 1999 and 2003 comparing data of United States students to students in other countries

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In recent years a marked increase in local enrolment at the Walworth Barbour American International School in Israel (WBAIS) has occurred. More Israeli citizens living permanently in the country, both native-born and those who have chosen to make Israel their home have registered their children in the school despite the knowledge that the school adheres to an American style curriculum. The national curriculum of the state of Israel is not offered to local students as part of the general curriculum at WBAIS nor do opportunities exist at the school for official preparation of matriculation exams normally culminating Israeli high school study. These Bagrut exams are prerequisites for acceptance into national universities. Moreover, the language of instruction is English, not Hebrew, the official language of Israel. While some Hebrew language and Israeli culture instruction is afforded to primary level students and is offered to middle and high school students as an elective foreign language, the intensity of study is not sufficient for maintenance of Hebrew at a level needed for adequate success in the Bagrut exams. As an educator at the school, I have often pondered over the stimuli precipitating the increase in local enrolment, and have considered possible causes.

As a faculty member of WBAIS and a parent of former local students studying at the school, I had considered the advantages and disadvantages of enrolling my children in the school from two vantage points. As an American who had chosen to live in Israel, I had not understood the curriculum being taught at local schools and had disagreed with the values and attitudes presented in them. The apparent chaos of classroom dynamics, the aggressive behaviour of students, the large class sizes, my children's apparent lack of adequate academic progress and the absence of sufficient school-parent communication persuaded me to investigate other educational institutions for my children. Since other local schools presented similar characteristics and problems, and the American system of the international school offered a familiar curriculum representing my own personal values in addition to small intimate classes and individualised instruction opportunities, it was the school of choice for my family. I

had carefully considered the individual future benefits my children would gain from attending the international school and weighed those against the cost and losses incurred by their attendance at a non-Israeli school, specifically in the area of school fees, difficulties establishing lasting friendships and loss of a strong Israeli identity. In addition a certain amount of anger and frustration with the teachers and administration of my children's previous schools coloured my final decision. Thus, my own experiences piqued my interest in the matter of local school choice. However, when I was hired as a teacher at WBAIS local resident teachers were able to receive free tuition for their children, a benefit not allowed at present by local tax authorities. Had this not been the case, I would not have been able to afford the high tuition fees of the school and my choice would have been limited. I had originated from an English speaking country and had experienced the American public school system as a child so WBAIS was a comfortable choice, but what of native-born Israelis? Had other local resident parents considered their child's educational choices rationally before choosing the international school for their children or had their choices been the result of more emotional reactions to specific situations? Why would Israeli parents choose WBAIS as their school of choice while living in their own country? Several questions located in three areas of focus came to mind as I reflected on this subject: the question of the medium of instruction being English, the international status of the school and the private versus public school debate. Other questions arose as I reflected on these areas:

Did the Israeli parents prefer that their children be educated in English and if so, why?

Did they believe that becoming fluent in the English language would be more advantageous than developing a community ethos and a strong Israeli identity?

Did the local parents regard a private school as a more effective learning environment than public schools?

Did the increase of local enrolment reflect a desire on the part of Israeli parents for their children to be exposed to diverse cultures?

1.1.2 How important is the knowledge of English to Israelis?

In Israeli public schools, the English language-teaching program is generally regarded by the public as being moderately successful in enabling Israeli students to acquire a well-grounded knowledge of oral proficiency in English, especially when

supplemented with private tuition. In the public schools formal English language instruction begins in third or fourth grades and is offered as forty-five minute lessons twice a week. In some schools oral English has been offered in the first and second grades on an experimental basis. Many parents, who are able pay for extra tuition, supplement classroom instruction with private after-school lessons. From sixth grade onwards students generally receive forty-five minute lessons three to five times a week. At the completion of eleventh and twelfth grades, students who expect to continue on to tertiary education must take a matriculation exam in English comprised of oral and written components. In addition to formalised school instruction, English language television programs, films and a sizable English speaking resident population have provided English language input and opportunities for Israeli students to use the language outside the classroom. Additionally, many Israelis travel abroad and must use English to communicate; hence, the motivation for acquiring knowledge in English exists. As there are plenty of opportunities for children to acquire a solid grounding in English within Israeli society, a parental desire for an English language medium of instruction for their children does not seem a strong reason alone for choosing an international school education.

1.1.3 Are private schools better than public?

Parental freedom of school choice is a controversial topic; its advocates believe the right to choose a school for one's children leads to superior educational outcomes. Proponents for school choice (Coulsen, 1996; Chubb & Moe) argue that competition for student enrolment forces schools to adjust their programs to the particular demands and learning styles of their constituents, providing for a better match of educational needs. The argument (Apple, 2001; Goldhaber, 2001; Fischman, 2001; Woods, 1993; Chubb and Moe, 1990) put forth is that competition in the educational marketplace serves to sever the monopoly of public schools; only effective schools, those with high academic outcomes, survive while ineffective schools, those with poor academic outcomes are forced to close. School choice advocates (Chubb and Moe, 1990) maintain that a lack of choice and freedom from the bureaucratic control of the public school sector discourages educational quality. When parents are free to choose their children's schools they make rational informed choices that most clearly suit their child's particular needs. Supporters of parental choice (Coulsen, 1996; Chubb & Moe, 1990) contend that educators in private schools have greater autonomy

to respond to the needs of students and parents' wishes since the stakeholders reflect the demands of the marketplace (Glass, 1997). They (Coulsen, 1996; Chub & Moe, 1990) argue that historically, privately operated and funded schools have consistently offered programs benefiting their clients while bureaucratically-dominated public systems have tended to teach subjects profiting their founders or administrators and are of little value to the general public.

Glass (1997) counters that curricula and administrations at public schools are too divergent to attempt comparisons. Many public schools offer wide and varied curricula and present a considerable freedom of choice to their stakeholders to choose elective subjects according to their personal needs and interests. She disputes the arguments put forth by Chub and Moe (1990) that private schools are more effective educational institutions, that private school teachers have more autonomy and motivation to address the needs of pupils and argues that private school teachers may be just as constrained by their administrators and school boards as in public schools.

The reality of the situation is complex. Teachers in public schools may be just as highly motivated to satisfy the needs of their stakeholders as those in private schools. The primary determinants of autonomy are the size and complexity of the organisation and not its governance (Glass, 1997). Yet there is a perception in society that private schools are more effective learning environments since they are run as successful educational businesses and are directly responsible to their stakeholders' level of satisfaction to remain solvent (Glass, 1997). In actuality, private schools encompass as much diversity of content, process and purposes as public schools dependent on the communities they serve (Glass, 1997). The greatest autonomy among teachers and administrators in Glass' study (1997) whether in public or private schools, was derived from the perception of being part of a successful school, one in which students gained admission to colleges of their choice. When taking into account the diversity of student populations and curricular subjects available at public schools', advocates (Coulsen, 1996; Chub & Moe, 1990) views about public schools' curricular limitations appear inaccurate and unfair.

Through anecdotal evidence during casual discussions, local parents at WBAIS seem to concur with school choice proponents views that private schools are superior

educational institutions to public, not because they are run as successful businesses but because they can choose the best students and teachers. Parents often related how happy they were with the way school staff interacted personally with their children and involved parents on a regular basis. Some parents related their children's unpleasant experiences with seemingly uncaring teachers and administrators in public schools.

1.1.4 Do parents prefer an international or multicultural education?

WBAIS, like other international schools around the globe, was not established to address the needs of the local community. Its purpose was to offer an English language medium of instruction to children of a largely expatriate community (Mackenzie, Hayden & Thompson, 2001). The school was established in 1958 under the auspices of the American Embassy and State Department as a private, secular, co-educational institution offering an American educational program to English proficient students of all cultures and nationalities; it is the only secular international school in the country. The school, presently located fifteen kilometres north of Tel Aviv, was created as a tax-exempt non-profit American organisation headed by a superintendent and a school board elected by the members of the school community. It serves a community of about four hundred and thirty or more students representing fifty nations. The student body comprises roughly twenty five percent American, twenty five percent local Israeli, and fifty percent other country nationals, mainly from the diplomatic and multinational communities (WBAIS, 2006). If Israeli parents have preferences towards an international education for their children, the following is what WBAIS offers them:

The school encompasses three independent branches, the elementary school from grades kindergarten through fifth grade (ages five to eleven), middle school from grades six through eight (ages eleven to fourteen) and high school from grades nine through twelve (ages fourteen to eighteen). Each school is headed by a principal. The high school at present offers an academic track only leading to university acceptance and the American Advanced Placement Program to qualified participants.

The school employs seventy American and local resident faculty; most locally hired faculty hold dual nationality and are primarily of North American, British and South

African origin. Overseas faculty members are hired from public schools in the United States or from other international schools around the world. The mix of American and local resident staff reflects the American / Anglo-Saxon character of the school; the high percentage of local resident staff offers stability and continuity to the educational program and to a diverse and transient student population.

The core values of WBAIS reflect the school's attention to student achievement and to the promotion of respect for cultural diversity and individuality:

- Our community's strength resides both in its unity and in its diversity
- Each person as a member of the human family has a responsibility to contribute to the common good of society.
- A community is strengthened when individuals take responsibility for their own choices and actions.
- Each person is of equal worth and has the right to be treated with respect, compassion, and honesty.
- Human accomplishment is achieved through rigor, perseverance and commitment to life-long learning.
- A safe and nurturing environment is essential for human development (WBAIS, 2006)

While 'international' is part of the name of the school and the student body is multinational and multicultural in composition, the curriculum taught at the school is strongly American, and not international in character. WBAIS, at present, does not offer the International Baccalaureate Diploma program and locals who desire to attend Israeli universities must often complete a year of a university preparatory program (Michina) or take the Bagrut exams independently before being accepted into the university departments of their choice. Their alternative is to apply to American universities. Therefore, graduation from WBAIS may limit local children's future university choices in Israel or make entry into them more time consuming. Local parents who choose to enrol their children at the school seem willing to accept these potential drawbacks in favour of what they consider to be the advantages of an international school when compared to their perceived deficiencies of the public school system.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

Parental concern regarding a child's education is not constrained by geographic or socio-economic borders. Parents generally desire a quality education for their children independent of economic circumstances, although what constitutes quality is highly subjective and individual (Mackenzie et al, 2001). In many countries, individuals are restricted in their opportunities to determine which school is best suited to their child's needs; primary school children are required to attend local schools in their neighbourhoods or catchments (Mackenzie et al, 2001; Mackenzie et al 2003). Israel does not deviate from this pattern; students traditionally attend schools close to their domiciles. School outcomes may vary independent of location. Even in the most prestigious socio-economic areas where taxes to support education are higher, school outcomes are greatly influenced by the quality of administrators, teacher preparedness, professional development, class size, individualised instruction and parental involvement (Wenglinsky, 2002; Dobbelsteen, Levin & Oosterbeek, 2002; Stecher, McCaffrey & Bugliari, 2003; Blatchford, Bassett, Goldstein & Martin, 2003; Raj Subedi, 2003; Mosteller, Light & Sachs, 1996). In Israel, if parents are discontented with local schools in their area, they have recourse to request permission from local authorities to transfer their child to another school in that district, enrol their child in a religious-oriented school, send their child to a magnet or an independent private school or, as a last resort, relocate to another neighbourhood (Barrow, 2001).

While local external private schools exist on the secondary level, only semi-private primary schools are available (see page 28); most are associated with religious organizations, represent political ideologies and special academic interests or were established to address the specific requirements of special needs students (Shapira & Haymann, 1991; Chen, 1997). External high schools in Israel, like 'crammer schools' in the United Kingdom, concentrate on preparing students for the national matriculation exams needed for entry into tertiary education. They are run as private profit-making businesses and are not connected to the public school system. Most students who opt for these schools have not been able to complete their studies at public high schools usually due to poor academic performance or are after army

service and now desire to pass specific Bagrut exams to attend institutions of higher education in Israel or abroad.

Little research has been conducted on parental intentions and objectives at international schools and the processes employed by these parents when choosing a school for their children (Mackenzie et al, 2001 & 2003). Most research to date has dealt with trans-national families desire to find the best international school for their children in the country in which they have been posted temporarily and not with local residents. Few research studies (Schwindt, 2003; Potter & Hayden, 2004) have concentrated on Israeli parental motives for leaving their national school system in favour of an independent private school with a curriculum not recognised by the state in which they live as citizens. The Israeli population has increased at WBAIS within the last few years from an average of 15% a year to almost 25% in 2006. As more local parents in Israel are electing to send their children to an international school, it is interesting to understand the reasons precipitating the increase in order to address the particular needs of these local students.

As a member of staff at WBAIS, I have had the opportunity of conversing with parents at registration and have discussed with them their reasons for choosing an international school for their children. Although many Israeli parents articulated the need for their children to learn English fluently as a significant reason for enrolment, more parents stressed the desire for their children to enjoy their school experiences within an aesthetically pleasing and stimulating environment. Small classes and a challenging individualized program appeared to be of paramount importance. A few parents had expressed dissatisfaction with local schools as a prime motivating factor; they had intimated their child's individual needs were not being met to their satisfaction in the previous school. Surprisingly, evidence of school reports and parental testimonies would make it appear that most children had been academically successful in their local schools. Occasionally a parent would remark on affective difficulties encountered by their children. Upon further classroom contact with these children, I became aware of suspected special learning needs among some that had not been identified previously or were not made known to the staff and administration at the time of enrolment. However, special needs issues were not pertinent for all local enrolees. Many local students had no problems progressing academically or

socially, were independent learners and probably would have managed successfully in any educational environment. Why then were their parents insistent on removing them from the Israeli school system and placing them in an American oriented school?

Anecdotal evidence suggests that parents viewed the small classes at WBAIS, its multi-cultural and orderly atmosphere and its English language curriculum as influencing factors impacting their decisions to choose the school. Large public school classes, discontent with increased bullying at school and the apparent inability of teachers and administrators to address the problem were mentioned as strong elements impelling parents away from the public system. Is the growth of local enrolment a result of increased parental discontent with the national school system? The foci of this research are to investigate further into specific factors informing parental enrolment choices and describe the processes and information sources parents used to evaluate their school choice decisions. This information would contribute to the body of knowledge about local parental choice at international schools, an area that has been largely overlooked in international school research. In particular, this study would be of value to administrators and teachers at WBAIS in order to gain a better understanding of the desires and emotions underpinning local parents' choices so that their needs may be adequately met within current or future programmes. In this study, the name of the research setting is used with the permission of the school superintendent and the school board although all references to research participants will remain anonymous.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

2.1 Overview

This chapter establishes a theoretical framework for the study of parental school choice determinants. Chubb and Moe (1990) suggest that parents when given the opportunity choose what they consider to be best for their children's futures. They carefully consider the optimal returns their children will receive from a particular school measured against its possible deficiencies. Parents, according to Chubb and Moe (1990) employ rational choice when making school choice decisions; their decisions are ultimately based on the academic quality of the school. This assumption that school choice decisions are based on the academic quality of a school are challenged by research conducted in national systems in various Western countries (Coldron & Boulton, 1991; Hughes, Wikeley & Nash, 1994; Carroll & Walford, 1997; Bagley, Woods & Woods, 2001) and in international school settings (Mackenzie, Hayden & Thompson, 2003; Potter & Hayden, 2004). These studies indicate that a child's potential happiness is a powerful stimulus in parental decision-making (Coldron & Boulton, 1991; Hughes, Wikeley & Nash, 1994; Carroll & Walford, 1997; Bagley, Woods & Woods, 2001). In studies by Coldron and Boulton, (1991) and Hughes et al. (1994) in the United Kingdom, parents voiced security criteria, intrinsic/personal (Bagley et al. 2001) and child-centred concerns as school atmosphere, community ethos and discipline, as being of prime importance and may constitute factors propelling parents away from one school and drawing them towards another. While academic concerns are significant, influential school choice attributes include the existence or absence of pastoral activities, the quality of peer relationships and caring/uncaring approaches to children by teachers and staff (Bagley et al. 2001; Hughes et al. 1994; Coldron & Boulton, 1991; Mackenzie, Hayden & Thompson, 2003; Potter & Hayden, 2004).

Parents of special needs students articulated four main criteria when choosing a particular school: proximity of the school, the happiness of the child, the child's preference of a school and a structured and well-disciplined atmosphere (Coldron & Boulton, 1991; Bagley et al. 2001). Notably, the child's potential happiness is a strong enticement influencing parental choices for children with special needs towards

specific schools (Bagley et al. 2001) while a lack of attention to the needs of a child may be a decisive factor compelling parents away from a school. Ease of access and a desire for children to be part of a community ethos exert a strong force towards local community schools where there are shared values and substantial social connections (Hughes et al. 1994; Maddaus, 1990).

2.2 Is school choice rational?

Whilst criteria for parental choice may be different, are parents' choices rational? Advocates of school choice (Coulsen, 1996; Chub & Moe, 1990) contend that rational choice is inherent in all school choice decisions and informs most school choice plans in Western countries (Bosetti, 2004). Rational Choice Theory postulates that individual actions may be reduced to profit and loss terms (Bosetti, 2004). Individual players weigh the expected profit of their actions against costs incurred (Scott, 2000). The theory is based on the presumption that individuals '*attempt to calculate and to balance the rewards and costs of various actions that a person undertakes*' (Scott, 1995: 77) before embarking on that course of action. Embedded in Rational Choice Theory is the supposition conceived in economic theory that all social phenomena may be explained according to carefully calculated individual actions. Individuals are motivated by personal preferences and their actions are constrained by the information available to them at a given time (Bosetti, 2004; Scott, 2000; Scott, 1995):

Rational choice theories hold that individuals must anticipate the outcomes of alternative courses of action and calculate that which will be best for them. Rational individuals choose the alternative that is likely to give them the greatest satisfaction (Scott, 2000: 2).

Individuals maximize the potential rewards of an action while minimizing its potential drawbacks. A person will contemplate and estimate which future actions will engender the largest returns for the least possible cost to the stakeholder. The rational choice paradigm assumes that individuals always act rationally in order to receive approval or benefits from their behaviours while negating the function that emotions and cultural pressures play on human conduct.

Opponents (Bosetti, 2004; Glass, 1996) of school choice question the criteria that parents use when permitted to choose schools for their children. They believe parents do not always choose schools employing rational choice or by solely considering cognitive outcomes. They contend that parents use a variety of rationalities addressing all aspects of school content, and some of the rationalities parents utilize may be haphazard and unforeseen:

To make decisions regarding their children's education, parents will rely on their personal values and subjective desired goals of education, as well as others within their social and professional networks to collect information. Parents, whose network does not provide access to relevant and valuable information regarding options of school choice, are limited in their capacity to make informed choices (Bosetti, 2004: 388)

Bulman (2004) postulates that Rational Choice Theory does not sufficiently explain parental school decisions, that culture is salient in school choice decisions since it is the 'fabric out of which families make sense of education' (Bulman, 2004: 493). Parents may assume they make rational decisions about their child's school but their decisions are coloured by their own backgrounds, school experience, religious beliefs and social mores. By culture, Bulman refers to the 'tool kit' (2004:493) people use to view and understand their world:

Each person has different backgrounds and experiences and therefore has a different kit of tools. Different tools within each kit are used to make sense of different situations...Parents draw heavily upon the tools of their past educational experiences (and often religious faith) as they interpret the educational world and take action within it (Bulman, 2004:493.)

McCarthy, et al (2003) refers to culture as:

a set of dynamic, productive, and generative material (and immaterial) practices that regulate social conduct and behaviour, and that emphasize personal self-management (i.e., the modification of habits, tastes, and style), political affiliation, and trans/national identity (2003:450).

Parents may be strongly influenced by their own educational histories, by positive or negative school experiences, by family traditions or by values inculcated in various countries of origin. Family income, access to information and parental educational attainment have been cited in research (Bosetti, 2004; Le & Miller, 2003) as

predictors of parental preferences for private or alternative schools over public schools; but knowledge of informational resources is not enough to explain school choice inclinations since parents draw upon their own experiences instilled by culture when considering educational decisions (Bulman, 2004). Bulman (2004) argues that choosing a school cannot be reduced to simplistic idiosyncratic choices as one chooses to buy a product on the market as rational choice theorists contend, but is a reflection of culture:

The market analogy that pervades much of the school-choice debate does not capture the cultural complexity and contradictions involved in how educational choices are perceived, evaluated and acted upon by a diverse group of families in diverse educational contexts...These different approaches to schools should not be understood as tastes or preferences as rational choice theorists might describe them...Unlike most goods, schooling is a social process with implications for a student's social status – it is a link between a child's social origins and her social destination (Bulman, 2004: 514).

Clearly, socio-economic resources facilitate school choice by allowing the opportunity for a greater amount of their yearly expenditures to be spent on education if the parents so desire, but this does not guarantee that parents will choose to spend their resources on private schools. Parental educational attainment may provide parents with a greater understanding of information available through networks and a better capacity to activate the system than less educated parents (Bulman, 2004); however, this does not solely explain how parental education impacts school choice decisions. Parental decisions reflect different understandings of educational systems grounded in their cultural and social backgrounds. Parents recognize that school environments differ socially, culturally and morally as well as academically (Bulman, 2004).

2.3 Cost-benefits and push-pull

A theoretical model not raised in school choice literature that may be applied to the processes employed by parents when considering determinants of school choice is the Push/Pull Model (Thielemann, 2004; Peterson, 1968). This theory, generally used to explain the underlying forces of migrations of populations, is the most widely applied approach to theories of immigration (Avci & McDonald, 2000). The Push/Pull

Model suggests that there are factors in countries of origin that encourage people to leave, and positive attributes that attract migrants to a new life in the receiving country (Thielemann, 2004). Pull factors encompass social, economic and ideological attributes of the new environment, as in the need for work or the promise of a well paying job. Cropley (1983) argues that push-pull factors may even comprise idealistic views that a new land holds unlimited opportunities for advancement and success. There may also be a deliberate policy on the part of the new country to woo potential immigrants to it:

Pull factors are the characteristics of the receiving society which encourage people to take up residence there. These may include perceived social and economic advantages, a romantic feeling that the receiving society is a land of opportunity, or even deliberate policy on the part of the receiving society to tempt immigrants to leave their homelands and take up life in the new country (Copley, 1983:20).

In the Immigration Market Model, Borjas (1989) combines the Push/ Pull Model of Migration with Rational Choice Theory when he describes migrants as ‘wealth maximizers’ (Borjas, 1989:460). Borjas’ migrants use rational choice when maximizing the perceived benefits of migrating while weighing the possible costs of emigration before making final decisions. In their adaptation and application to school choice, both theories imply that there are factors pushing families away from particular schools and pulling them towards others after careful consideration of possible costs and benefits.

While cultural values and past educational experiences play an important role in school choice decisions, this does not negate the role that rational choice may play in parental deliberations. Values and past experiences do exert important push forces away from one school towards another. Although parents may react emotionally and angrily to specific incidents that have caused dissatisfaction with a particular school which serve as push factors, they may have carefully weighed the potential pull factors of the new school in relation to the future benefits their children would receive, balanced against its potential drawbacks. Local parents, who carefully consider the advantages of a school in relation to its suspected disadvantages, its push and pull factors, are employing the processes embedded in Rational Choice Theory.

The push/pull metaphor allows for a greater emotional component in school choice decisions than the cost/benefit basis of Rational Choice Theory.

2.4 Who defines quality?

An important aspect of school choice is the method employed by parents for receiving and considering information about perspective schools and the ways parents process this information. Ideas concerning the characteristics of what constitutes quality schools are extremely personal and socially bound. While parental decisions are not always based on academic factors, they may be strongly influenced by their own educational experiences and individual and family status ideologies (Holme, 2002). Decisions are not always determined by personal inspection of school premises or through an investigation of academic standards, e.g. achievement test scores (Bulman, 2004), but are guided by social opinion. In Hughes et al (1994) in the United Kingdom, parents sometimes relied on second-hand information about schools from friends and relatives, not from their own observations. Experiences recounted by friends, family and neighbours who had personal experiences with specific schools over months or years presented parents with credible evidence not easily attainable through brief school tours. It is reasonable to assume that information of this sort, while containing some emotional or exaggerated experiences, provided parents with valuable sources of information to consider.

Frequently, parents choose schools that are considered 'superior' by their friends and colleagues (Holme, 2002; Teelken, 1999; Wells & Crain, 1992). A school perceived as having students with unacceptable values and behaviour is often rejected for a school possessing 'acceptable' values. Holme (2002) postulates that value concerns voiced by parents are directly related to the racial or ethnic composition of the student population. Parents conceptualise their choices on the basis of school quality rather than on race or social status. They claim that their chosen schools satisfy their children's academic needs although few parents were actually acquainted with the school's academic standing or the scores on national achievement tests at the time of enrolment (Holme, 2002). Similarly, in a comparative study of school choice in the Netherlands, England and Scotland (Teelken, 1999), parental choice is based not on cognitive factors since this was not a major consideration, but on finding an

acceptable school population with a higher mean socio-economic status (Teelken, 1999). In a sense these parents are using rational choice in their deliberations although Ball (1993) might argue that parental school choice judgements involving racially or ethnically motivated reasons are emotional reactions rather than rationally thought out decisions. However, parents may have maximized the benefits of choosing a school in a high status area as more beneficial to their individual needs. They believe that the school will afford their children the best educational returns and would raise their social standing among friends and colleagues.

School visits and open days are an additional method of obtaining information. About half the parents in Hughes et al's (1996) study had made on-site inspections of schools before making their final decisions. School visits may encompass comprehensive investigations of school premises including classroom visits or may refer only to short discussions with headmasters and staff. Hunter (1991) asserts that parents consider school open days as a highly beneficial source of information for assessing school characteristics as general atmosphere, discipline and exam results since parents are able to ask questions about their concerns.

Parents sometimes obtain data about schools through brochures, information packets, newsletters and websites. These marketing tools are vehicles by which schools' ethos and attitudes are transmitted to parents, the schools' principle consumers. The relevance of school brochures and websites to satisfy the communication needs and desires of potential customers may be questioned. In Headington and Howson (1995), the value of the school brochure in the client-communication process among primary schools in the United Kingdom was explored. The researchers reviewed the content, presentation and distribution of four primary school brochures, as well as the marketing techniques used to determine the disposition and aims of the providers and clients. Additionally, the researchers investigated how schools used the school brochure to market primary schools as they affected a professional and non-professional clientele. Results revealed the professional groups of parents were empowered by their familiarity with educational jargon used in three of the brochures and could decode the hidden message in the texts. The non-professional parent groups were more concerned with social factors revealed in one of the brochures since they felt the other three were written specifically for education professionals. This

research revealed distinct differences in the needs of the two segments of the target population, which were not being met in the brochures of the four subject schools; thus Headington and Howson's (1995) research questions the effectiveness of brochures as a crucial marketing tool.

In a Canadian study (Bosetti, 2004), parents in twenty-nine primary schools were surveyed about their school choice determinants; the schools represented public, alternative public, religious private and secular private schools. The results demonstrated that parents choosing secular private schools were most likely to undertake an in depth investigation of a perspective school before making their choices:

Non-religious private school parents are most likely to inform their school choice decision by talking with teachers, the principal and the school counsellor (67%), through a school visit (64%), and through consultation with their social network of friends, neighbours, and other parents (58%). Twenty per cent of these parents consult with their child in the selection process. These parents are least likely to consult with other family members (6%), most likely to consult the school newsletter (7%), and second most likely to consult media reports (6%) as compared to other parent groups (Bosetti, 2004:395).

In Yang and Kayaardi (2004) the personal traits of parents choosing non-public schools were assessed to determine patterns inherent in their choices. 'Non-public' schools refer to religious-oriented schools, private and home schools. The researchers found that while religion was a significant reason for choosing a religious school, it was not the sole determinant. A high socio-economic level, a greater degree of educational attainment and occupational status were consistent characteristics of parents choosing religious schools. Conversely, Bulman (2004) found that firm religious beliefs exerted a decisive pull towards a private religious school among parents in his study since the school environment replicated the tenets in which they believed. For secular parents, greater parental educational and socio-economic levels were key factors when choosing private schools over public schools.

Le and Miller (2003) found social class to be the major determinant in the type of schools chosen by parents. Students who attended public schools were most likely to have working-class backgrounds while parents of students in private independent

schools were mostly professionals with middle or upper class backgrounds. Additional factors influencing public and private school enrolments are two-parent families and parents' educational attainments.

2.5 Schools in Israel - what choices are there?

While school choice in Israel has become more popular within the last ten years, most possibilities for choice exist within the public school sector. There are few purely private elementary and middle schools not overseen by the Israel Ministry of Education; international schools are the only private schools available at present. School choice in Israel is generally confined to religious; subject oriented or ideologically based public schools.

2.5.1 The structure of the public educational system

Historically, the public school system in Israel was created after the establishment of the modern state of Israel and reflected the socialist ideals of its founders. The system they created was highly centralised, representing an ideology of equity and integration. A state curriculum had been established to ensure that all schools taught an identical course of study in a corresponding manner with primary schools serving as local community schools (Gaziel, H., 1996; Shapira & Haymann, 1991). A national curriculum that was mandated by the Ministry of Education covers core subjects including mathematics, Israeli and Jewish history, Arab culture and history, Bible studies, science and technology and English (Israel Ministry of Education, 2005).

Israeli public education is divided into three parallel systems, secular, religious and Arab. The three systems were created with the intent of offering equal opportunities to its stakeholders (Eden et al, 2002); each incorporates four main divisions, the pre-primary years: from ages two to five, the primary grades from grade one to grade six, the middle school or junior high school section from grades seven to nine and the high school from grades ten to twelve. Children traditionally attend schools for four or five hours daily, six days a week in the primary years and six to seven hours daily in middle and high schools. The main objectives of the primary years' program are to

teach literacy skills, promote individual strengths while encouraging understanding of individual differences (Israel Ministry of Education, 2005).

There are two major tracks in the high school level: academic and vocational.

Completion of high school may involve a general certificate of completion; however, if advanced university study is desired, high scores in matriculation (Bagrut) exams covering various content area subjects must be attained.

In the late 1960's a reform policy was initiated in the educational system to equalise the social composition of schools by establishing three-year junior high schools; its philosophy was to bring together children from different socio-economic neighbourhoods. Initially, the parental choice rationale in the Israeli system was to enhance school quality, expand parental involvement in schools and limit governmental interference in education (Yonah, 2000). Its chief aim was to ensure equity for all stakeholders. However, since school choice policies and decisions tend to be highly individual in nature, school choice in Israel subsequently served as a means of parental opposition to reforms by presenting them with an alternative to integrated schools. Thus, choice provided a means of avoiding integration reforms that were not acceptable to the Western elite or to Eastern parents who were descended from Arab countries. Western, mostly affluent parents believed integrated classrooms created a diverse atmosphere that interfered with the academic attainment of their children. Eastern parents believed their children paid a high psychological price for integration with little academic return. There have been vehement objections to the integration reform policy since its inception; consequently, it has never been fully implemented according to its original framework (Yonah, 2000).

Yonah (2000) postulates that the increased demand for parental choice in Israel mirrors an increase in the rise of neo-liberalism and the decline of social-democratic political power in the country. The diminished influence of the Labour Party has enabled subsequent right-wing governments to initiate cuts to social services including education allocations. Since 1994 the combination of this with worsening economic realities, has increased the gap between the financial elite and the economically disadvantaged. At present, families at the top twenty percent of the economic scale spend ten times more on education than do the bottom twenty percent,

including expenditure on 'grey education', such as the additional enrichment courses and private tutoring. Moreover, dissatisfaction with Israel's recent poor showing on international exams in mathematics (Tarbelsi-Hadad, 2004) and persistent news reports of school violence has fuelled discontent with the educational system. Public concern has been raised about the curriculum in pedagogies of specific subject areas, the perceived absence of sufficient administrative management at schools, and lack of classroom discipline (Tarbelsi-Hadad, 2004). Yonah (2000) concludes that personal school choice in Israel does not facilitate, and is not consistent with equal educational opportunities, but undermines the personal autonomy of poor children whose parents are unable to purchase 'grey' education. Chen (1997) concurs that publicly supported schools of choice violate principles of equity in education due to their increased cost per student. Parents are expected to subsidise the cost of running the school with additional payments while enabling more affluent families to flee from integrated classrooms in regular public schools.

2.5.2 Alternative public schools of choice in Israel

Within the last twenty to thirty years parental dissatisfaction with the conservative character of the centralized educational system has led to the development of two major types of public schools of choice: ideologically-motivated schools and schools concentrating on specific content areas. These alternative publicly supported schools are based on increased parental involvement and on a particular 'educational ethos' (Shapira & Haymann, 1991). They may be termed semi-private or alternative schools since parents are required to contribute considerable fees for supplementary activities.

2.5.3 Ideologically motivated schools of choice

Ideologically associated schools have developed from a discontentment over the perceived lack of ideological content in the local school system. Many of these schools represent an enhanced Jewish curriculum (Tali, Noam,), studies concentrating on enriched social participation or on values such as freedom and democracy (community, open or democratic schools). Tali and Noam schools espouse a traditional rather than orthodox religious philosophy. Schools are co-educational as compared to the single-sex schools of the orthodox religious stream but religious traditions are an integral part of daily studies. The community, open or democratic schools present a more radical educational philosophy in which children are

encouraged to make their own decisions about their curriculum and participate in the daily running of their schools. Parents from English-speaking countries have been instrumental in establishing these schools on a basis of humanistic educational principles representing a recognition that different learning styles exist. Teaching methods employed must encourage and not hinder a child's emotional and cognitive development (Shapira & Haymann, 1991). Parents are actively involved in the educational aspects of the school, including the determination and implementation of a curriculum based on the national curriculum but enriched with innovative teaching methods and components of the school's ideology. Whilst advocating equity, assuring it through social integration is more problematic at ideologically motivated schools since middle and upper class families tend to choose them. Furthermore, local authorities have been deficient in administrative procedures guaranteeing ethnic balance (Shapira & Haymann, 1991).

The ideologies represented by ideologically motivated schools like Tali in Israel are comparable to the integrated schools of Northern Ireland. In both schools, parental choices represent a desire on the part of the parents to be more actively involved in their children's education. These two types of schools are similar in parental intent to give their students quality educations grounded in religious traditions but differ in the types of students represented in the school. The Tali schools' curricula are steeped in Jewish traditions although the schools do not enforce stringent orthodox viewpoints, and student bodies represent a singular religious group. Parents choose these schools to provide their children with a solid background in Jewish traditions within a child-centred framework. The integrated schools of Northern Ireland, on the other hand, are chosen specifically because they contain cross-denominational student populations deemed desirable by parents and considered beneficial to community relations; consequently, by choosing a cross-denominational school, the parents' choices embody strong political, religious or social convictions (Morgan et al. 1993). Parental decisions for choosing these schools, therefore, are based on ideology, educational concerns, parental dissatisfaction with previous schools and convenience of location.

The perceived quality of education received by children in the integrated school in Northern Ireland was a major factor in school choice (Morgan et al. 1993). Socially embedded parental perceptions of the status of the school were important although

parents expressed varying opinions of what represented a quality education. Some parents expressed concerns about the *de facto* comprehensive status of the school since admission to the school was through a combination of interview, personal application and primary school reports rather than the results of the 11+ examination. Although the integrated school was not considered on the same status level as a grammar school, it was assigned a higher status than a regular comprehensive. Whilst some parents articulated academic preparation as a reason for choosing a particular school, detailed information about academic standing and exam results were not investigated.

Parental dissatisfaction with the formality of education in Northern Irish schools was cited as an important pull factor for choosing an integrated school. Parents hoped the integrated school would place more emphasis on the child and were impressed with the child-centred aims of the school and the close parent-staff relationships alluded to in the school philosophy. Some children were placed in an integrated school as the result of parent-staff disagreements in the previous school, because they had not progressed educationally as expected or that they had experienced emotional or behavioural problems.

A number of parents had chosen an integrated school for its affective pull factors since it was the nearest in proximity and the most convenient to reach from home or on the way to work. Accessibility is a major determinant in parental decisions regarding choice of schools since inexpensive transportation to schools and funds for transportation are not always readily available (Hughes et al, 1994). Convenience of location was not a prime pull factor for Tali parents since students are transported to the school from a myriad of locations. However, the majority of all parents in both types of schools voiced combinations of divergent and contradictory views, exemplifying the complicated processes involved in parental determinations of choice (Morgan, 1996; Shapira & Haymann, 1991).

An ideologically based school concept that has been receiving increased attention during recent years is the democratic school. This type of school is similar to the Summerhill School (Summerhill, 2004) in the United Kingdom. It is based on the principle that children should have an equal role along with parents, teachers and

administrators in deciding how the school is to function and in choosing the subjects they will study (Kraft, 2006). The ideological basis of the school is that children are naturally curious and desire to learn. They will learn to analyse situations and make informed choices by given opportunities to hone their skills in these areas. Consequently, children have a role in deciding how the school budget is spent, what must be studied and when, and must take responsibility for ordering bus transportation and food provisions for field trips and other school activities (Kraft, 2006). Respect for the individual is an integral part the school's philosophy. Classes are small with no more that fifteen students per mentor teacher. There are no required exams or classes and grades are not given. Most students come from secular households but from various socio-economic backgrounds. Although the schools receive some public funding, parents are charged an annual fee of approximately \$1200.00. Poor families are eligible for scholarships. Israel is considered a leader in this area internationally since there are a comparatively large number of democratic schools in existence in a small country (Kraft, 2006) and since 1987; twenty-four democratic schools have opened throughout the country. The concept of the democratic school is not attractive to all parents as an alternative to public education. Students need to be focused, self-disciplined and have open minds. Although students can study for high school matriculation exams, no records are kept by democratic schools of how many students actually pass them since it is not believed that exams are a proper measure of how well students are educated (Kraft, 2006).

2:5.4 Content-oriented schools

Content-based schools of choice have arisen based on the American magnet school model. These schools focus on a distinct content area while providing a modified version of the national curriculum. The development of content-based schools has been encouraged by the Ministry of Education in an effort to attract pupils from varying socio-economic strata who have interests or talents in particular academic areas. Funds for the foundation of these schools come from local municipalities and parents (according to economic level). Entrance is by way of a selection process involving portfolios, interview, auditions and previous academic history. In order to maintain equity, local municipalities have determined that a proportion of students originate from underprivileged neighbourhoods. Content-based schools differ from other public schools in that the students are tracked into specialised areas and remain

in these areas while studying at the school. Subjects are taught by teachers and professional instructors paid by the municipalities or according to individual contracts. Parental and community involvement is essential in educational-related activities, although parents are not party to the schools' decision-making processes (Shapira & Haymann, 1991).

2.6 Why parents choose private schools?

The uncertainty, the anger and the emotionally charged debates between teachers and the Ministry of Education about the future of Israeli schools may have contributed strong push factors away from public education towards private education, or it may just have provided a backdrop against which the decisions of parent participants in this study have been taken. Participants had elected to reject the public school system in favour of a fully private American oriented international school. During discussions at the time of registration they had voiced the belief that a private school could better provide highly qualified teachers, more individualised attention to the needs of their children due to smaller class sizes and a broader curriculum than that offered in the public school system. Many parents simply articulated the desire that their children would enjoy going to school in a safe and friendly atmosphere. They were willing to risk the deterioration of their children's home language skills and a feeling of difference that might result from their children's separation from their own culture.

Supplementary to dissatisfaction with school integration, parental choice in Israel may be influenced by recent media reports concerning the deficiencies of public schools; most notably poor results on international tests and increasing violence in schools. At present in Israel there is much discussion in the daily media about the poor showing Israeli fifth grade and seventh grade youngsters have made in international standardised tests measuring academic growth and efficiency of schools in mathematics, science and English. Education professionals explain the poor results on the exams by pointing to the lack of discipline in classrooms, negative atmosphere in the schools, lack of teacher – student contact time and high absenteeism among students (Tarbelsi-Hadad, 2004). Others view the disparity of test results as reflections of inequality of opportunities between children of upper income families

and those in the lower economic levels. In many schools parents are required to pay for extra services for their children allowing the Ministry of Education to be negligent in providing required academic and pastoral assistance mandated under education laws due to budget cutbacks. As a result children's opportunities in lower socio-economic areas have been restricted since their families cannot afford to pay for extra educational services (Tarbelsi-Hadad, 2004).

Violence in the schools has been of special concern in the media; it is seen as symptomatic of the present state of the society in general. In an article that appeared in one of the leading Hebrew language daily newspapers (Sa'ar, 2001) the results of an international study of violence in school systems around the world was reviewed. The TIMSS survey (Sa'ar, 2001) was conducted in 1999 and looked at varying aspects of educational experience that included discipline, cheating, truancy, school vandalism, theft, and violence among teachers and students. The study was conducted in thirty-eight countries and encompassed one hundred and fifty thousand eighth grade students from five thousand seven hundred schools. It listed participant nation's schools in order of those most violent to least violent. Israeli schools were found to be the most violent of all countries surveyed. More than one quarter of all Israeli eighth-graders claimed to have been the objects of physical violence committed by fellow schoolmates. Israel is also placed number one in the area of verbal violence; fifty-one percent of eighth grade students reported being cursed or humiliated by their peers. When verbal abuse by teachers and faculty was investigated, the country came in fourth on the list. Israeli students were placed second in the world in terms of reporting the most incidents of school vandalism; thirty percent of the children had admitted to vandalizing school property. Israeli schools came in fourth place in the rate of thefts of personal property perpetrated during school hours. In addition to school violence, the TIMSS survey also reported on classroom behaviours; sixty-one percent of Israeli eighth-graders reported that they often interrupted their teachers during class (Sa'ar, 2001).

Similarly, in a national Ministry of Education - sponsored survey conducted in 2000 among fifteen hundred teachers, two hundred principals and sixteen thousand students, twenty percent of teachers and ten percent of principals reported that they felt helpless to confront school violence. The fear of violence has escalated to the

point where children are electing to stay home rather than deal with threats at school (Hoffman, 2000). Dina Kraft (2006) writing in *The Jewish Week* sums up the crisis in Israeli public schools:

Students place near the bottom on international tests compared to their Western counterparts. They scramble for attention in large and crowded classes, and rates of school violence - mostly in the form of severe bullying - are high. Teachers are underpaid and, in some cases, considered under qualified.

2.7 Private schools as effective learning environments

Chubb and Moe (1990) argue that private schools should to be viewed as more effective educational institutions. They refer to effective schools as those with high academic outcomes as measured by standardised tests. Other definitions of 'effective' schools are based on the assumption that effective schools promote progress for all their pupils based on a consideration of students' initial attainment and background factors (Mortimore et al, 1988). Expanding on Mortimore et al's (1988) definition, the Australian Department of Education (2004) defines effective schools as schools that add value to students' achievement above their expected progress given intake characteristics of the student body. In other words, student outcomes in effective schools exceed expectations (Australian Department of Education, 2004). Schools that succeed in moving students from a low starting point of academic attainment to a higher level of attainment may be considered 'effective'. Drever (1991) believes that there are two major issues involved in any discussion of school effectiveness. The first issue is that all stakeholders in schools may not hold the same views about what actually constitutes effectiveness. Teachers and administrators may be more concerned with cognitive outcomes while parents may be more concerned about social/affective factors as whether or not their children are happy at school. Academic effectiveness may not always be linked to social effectiveness (Mortimore et al, 1988). The second key issue according to Drever (1991) is that there is not enough evidence in research on effective schools to measure how various outside influences affect school effectiveness.

While school effectiveness remains a contentious issue, there are several characteristics that have been identified in research as indicative of quality or 'effective' schools (Hunter, 1991; Drever, 1991; Mok & Flynn, 1997; Fertig, 2000; Wenglinsky, 2002; Dobbelsteen, Levin and Oosterbeek, 2002; Blatchford et al. 2003; Stecher et al. 2003). These qualities are the following:

- A small student population
- Small classes
- A challenging curriculum focusing on higher order critical thinking skills
- Individualised instruction
- Continued professional development for teachers
- Professional leadership qualities of principals
- Shared vision and goals
- School climate conducive to learning
- Parental involvement

These characteristics will be described in more detail.

2.7.1 Small school populations

Numerous research studies (Mok & Flynn, 1997; Cotton, 1996) have been conducted on the advantages and disadvantages of small and large schools; the widely held belief is that small schools are more conducive to improved quality of student life. Whilst large schools may be able to offer a variety of subjects, students in small schools tend to participate in extra-curricular activities more and report better interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers. Small schools tend to have fewer disciplinary problems, increased opportunities for students to develop leadership qualities and a lower dropout rate. Teachers in small schools are more likely to emphasize experiential learning and express satisfaction with their work (Mok & Flynn, 1997; Cotton, 1996). Whilst many small schools are located in rural areas, the question is whether the qualities cited by students and teachers in small schools are related to school size or to the effect of their rural locations. Cotton (1996) contends that it is the small size of schools that account for increased academic and social benefits, not their locality.

2.7.2 Small classes

There is a popular assumption among parents that small classes encourage increased academic performance. Some states in the United States (California, Florida, and Tennessee) have initiated programs to reduce class sizes in public schools in order to achieve increased academic excellence. Although class size reduction programs in the these states appear to have been successful in increasing student achievement in the lower elementary grades in reading and arithmetic, the question arises as to whether the increased achievement is due to smaller class sizes or to educational reforms enacted at the same time (Strecher et al. 2003; Mosteller et al. 1996; Dobbelsteen et al. 2002; Pate-Bain, H., Archilles, C.M., Boyd-Zaharias, J. & McKenna, B., 1992). Further research needs to be conducted in this area to eliminate variables affecting results.

In the United Kingdom recent research conducted by Blatchford et al. (2003) demonstrated that the lowest achievers in literacy skills at entry level to school benefited the most from small classes below twenty-five students. There is evidence of increased attention, less off-task behaviours, more purposeful interactions with students, expanded depth of the teachers' knowledge about the children and increased sensitivity to individual student needs (Blatchford et al. 2003). Although it is easier for teachers to deal with small classes effectively and to approach children in a more personalised way, teachers in small classes tend to use fewer cooperative and group activities. Most importantly for parental decisions dealing with school choice, parents and teachers perceive small classes as more effective learning environments for enhancing student academic achievement.

2.7.3 Challenging curriculum, individualised instruction

A challenging curriculum taught by teachers possessing high expectations for their pupils has appeared repeatedly in research (Wenglinsky, 2002; Fertig, 2000; Tama, 1989) on effective schooling. The teaching of critical thinking skills and a relaxed and a pleasant learning environment have a positive effect on student achievement. Teachers who encourage critical thinking in their classrooms provide opportunities for students to read widely, formulate, question, discuss and defend their opinions. Students' individualized learning styles and learning preferences are taken into account in addition to receiving positive reinforcement; instruction may be

differentiated while expectations remain high. Parents believe that individualized instruction is more likely to take place in private schools that are more receptive to the needs and desires of their student populations (Holme, 2002; Wenglinsky, 2002; Glass, 1997).

2.7.4 Continued professional development

In addition to effective classroom practices there are two aspects of teacher quality that are discussed by Wenglinsky (2002) in his discussion of effective teaching: teacher attainment and professional development. In his study, three teacher inputs, education level, major subject area of study and experience along with information concerning professional development in critical thinking skills, performance-based assessment, cultural diversity and cooperative learning were measured to ascertain to what extent these areas contributed to increased student academic attainment. The results of his study indicate that professional development tends to influence teacher practices most strongly; the more professional development teachers receive, the more likely teachers would be actively willing to engage in hands-on learning activities within the classroom regardless of educational attainment.

2.7.5 Leadership qualities of principals, shared vision

Fertig (2000) postulates that principals' professional leadership abilities are significant aspects of effective schooling that have appeared in recent educational studies. Administrators and staff of effective schools share a common vision and purpose and act as positive role models for their students. Principals and teachers have high expectations for their students and a shared perception of what constitutes effective teaching. While no one managerial style is appropriate for all educational institutions, administrators in effective schools succeed in developing a leadership style that is conducive to the size and cultural makeup of students and staff (Blandford & Shaw, 2001). Administrators in effective schools cultivate a working relationship that reflects an understanding of all school stakeholders. Moreover, Hayden and Thompson (1995) suggest that a balanced composition of a school's board of directors is an additional determining feature in the formation of the character of a school. Administrators and staff of effective schools must be able to work harmoniously with the school's governance body.

2.7.6 A school climate conducive to learning

An environment conducive to learning has appeared repeatedly in research (Fertig, 2000; Sears, 1998) on learning styles and language acquisition in effective schools. Effective schools have attractive learning environments and orderly atmospheres appropriate for work. Rooms are decorated with student projects and the internal structures and lighting take into account students' varied learning styles (Griggs & Dunn, 1996). There is a focus on academic success and the mastery of content. Teachers in effective schools are self-reflective and committed to their teaching (Fertig, 2000; Wenglinsky, 2002).

2.7.7 Parental involvement

A clear aspect of effective schooling that emerges in research findings (Blanford & Shaw, 2000; Fertig, 2000; Swick, 1992) involves parental involvement and support. Parents, especially those from different cultures, come with varying expectations. Effective schools are sensitive to the expectations, desires, adjustment problems and cultural beliefs of its stakeholders (Blanford & Shaw, 2000). Schools that are family-centred, that encourage teacher-parent relationships, parental involvement as volunteers and monitors of student behaviours, have positive effects on student learning (Fertig, 2000; Swick, 1992).

2.8 Choosing international schools

Little research exists on choice in international schools in general beyond the desire for an English medium school or family circumstances requiring academic mobility. Whilst there has been some research on choice at international schools in Switzerland (Mackenzie et al 2001, 2003) and in Argentina (Potter & Hayden, 2004) involving local parents, it is difficult to make comparisons with Israel since the context and conditions of local parents are so diverse.

Globally, international schools have developed to attend to the needs of an expatriate community and do not usually cater to a wide cross-section of the local community (Mackenzie et al, 2003). Whilst members of the local economic elite may choose to enrol their children in international schools, the language of instruction may be

English or French and the curriculum may be American, British or French-oriented rather than that of their host country.

The pull factors for local parents choosing to enrol their children in private international schools are numerous but are rarely concept driven (Schwindt, 2003). In many countries, the international school serves an elite diplomatic and multi-national community and an international school education is looked upon as prestigious; it is a means to high status employment within the country and abroad. Parents may desire an English language education for their children if relocation abroad is planned or future attendance at an American or British university is considered (Sears, 1998). An international school education is seen as maximising opportunities for a child's future in the areas of tertiary education and future employment. Often the reasons are not articulated at the time of registration but may include dissatisfaction with the local system for various concerns, academic or social difficulties and special learning needs that are not being adequately met in the national system (Mackenzie et al., 2003; Schwindt, 2003). In a preliminary survey of parental preferences in choosing international schools conducted by Mackenzie, Hayden and Thompson (2001), parents voiced the desire for their children to receive an education in English as a decisive reason pulling them towards international schools, irrespective of cultural background or age of student. Host country nationals did not regard an English language education as being of primary importance but ranked it high on their list of priorities. More importantly to them was the international aspect of international education. Whilst these push/pull factors revealed in international school literature (Mackenzie et al., 2003; Schwindt, 2003) answer the questions raised at the beginning of this chapter in relation to local Swiss parents, a homogeneous population, they may not fully articulate the reasons underlying local Israeli parents' choices. Local Swiss parents had many choices of international schools; local Israeli parents representing a culturally diverse population had only one secular international school and two others connected to religious organizations (the Anglican Church and the Church of Scotland) from which to choose.

2.8.1 International or multicultural

Local Swiss parents in Mackenzie et al's (2001, 2003) studies expressed the desire for their children to have an international education as an important reason pulling them

towards international schools. The question arises as to what constitutes an international education in the eyes of host country nationals? Is it primarily contact with a multinational student body that is attractive, a curriculum that is considered to be international or the nurturing of a multicultural attitude among the students that is paramount? Malcolm McKenzie (1998) cites five approaches to the meaning of an international education as set out in the aims of the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO, 1994). They are the following:

- promote international understanding
- provide educational services to an international mobile expatriate community
- work with national education systems to develop a balance, rigorous and international curriculum
- create an internationally recognized pre-university curriculum
- provide a university entrance examination giving access to higher education world-wide

While these aims seek to define international education, they do not explain, as McKenzie observes, exactly what is meant by the word 'international'. Instead, McKenzie (1998) proposes eight core values that are characteristic of a trans-national education and may serve to define what constitutes 'international'. They are the following:

- open-mindedness
- world-mindedness
- promotion of a sense of global interdependence
- promotion of individual and cultural self-esteem
- promotion of a commitment to world peace
- tolerance for other cultures
- decline of bias and prejudice
- encouragement of a passion for learning

Perhaps these values would be more suitable to Israeli parents' perceptions of what constitutes an international education. Among local parents surveyed by MacKenzie et al. (2001), the International Baccalaureate diploma was not a top priority. Among

parents intent on sending their children to Europe for a tertiary education, the International Baccalaureate did receive a high rating, although not among parents of primary-aged children. The International Baccalaureate did not seem a pressing need to them since their children had many years until high school. In addition, host country nationals did not articulate strong dissatisfaction with the national system as a decisive push factor away from local schools, although some local parents did regard the national schools as unsuitable for their children (Mackenzie et al, 2001).

In further research undertaken by Mackenzie et al. (2003), the motives underlying parental selections of international schools in Switzerland were examined. The researchers were concerned with exploring the prominence of 'internationalism' in parental choice; the importance of a curriculum promoting tolerance, international understanding and empathy in a multicultural setting and the existence of the International Baccalaureate program were significant factors in parental decisions. The research also delved into the relevance of school reputation, examination results, first impressions and the desire for their children to be educated in English as determinants influencing parental choice. Their results revealed that the desire for an English language education for their children was the prime pull determinant for choosing an international school.

Correspondingly, in research conducted in Buenos Aires bilingual schools (Potter & Hayden, 2004), an English language education was considered an indispensable asset to students' future position in society and employment prospects. Although much of the information provided by Potter and Hayden was anecdotal, the respondents in bilingual schools indicated that fluency in English and its perceived social benefits, along with the happiness of the child were strong determinants for choosing private schools. Additionally, parents believed that private bilingual schools offered a higher-quality education.

The intent of the research undertaken by Mackenzie et al. (2001, 2003) was to look specifically for the importance of an English language and international curriculum to parents at international schools among host country nationals. The intent of this study was to investigate areas of parental discontent with the public school system that caused them to reject it and to determine factors influencing Israeli parental decisions

of school choice. It was within an atmosphere of disenchantment, apprehension and dissention concerning the state of Israel's public educational system that some Israeli parents opted to reject public schools in favour of a private international school, a choice available, however, only to a small economically advantaged group.

2.9 Attempts at public education reform in Israel

The Israeli government, well aware of the present deficiencies of the public school system, launched a comprehensive investigation into Israeli and foreign public educational systems in order to recommend comprehensive changes to the pedagogical, structural and organizational domains. After fifteen months of study by a select committee of one hundred professionals chosen by the government, recommendations and initiatives for improving the state of public education were presented by the Ministry of Education for the approval of the government. The plan, similar to President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act and the British governments 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' programme, recommended a business-like approach for schools and specified that teachers and administrators be held accountable for the successes or failures of students (Kraft, 2006). Recommendations of the committee included the following:

- Instituting goal and achievement - oriented, standards based curricula
- Strengthening early childhood development programs
- Reducing disparities among socio-economic groups
- Creating a challenging educational environment conducive to learning, protecting students from all forms of violence
- Instituting citizenship and character education in the curriculum
- Improving the status of teachers by increasing salaries, encouraging professional development and increasing the minimum requirements of teacher training programs
- Increasing pedagogical, organizational and budgetary autonomy of schools
- Allowing parents and children to choose an educational institution at all stages of education while encouraging parental involvement in their children's education.

- Shortening the school week from six to five days while increasing the length of the school day to enable all students to participate in pastoral and complementary education at no extra cost
- Increasing faculty work hours to expand teacher-student contact time and allow for professional growth opportunities

While the government's plan would encourage parents' right to choose a school for their children, even before the Dovrat Plan (Ministry of Education, 2005) was officially released to the public and presented to the government for approval, teachers' unions began a campaign of vehement opposition to the proposals (Yediot Achronot, 19 May 2005). At the same time, the Ministry of Education began distributing redundancy letters to four thousand five hundred classroom and specialist teachers (Khromchenko, 2006). The unions contended that the recommendations of the committee did not focus on the real issues while it placed the onus of public school ills squarely on the shoulders of classroom teachers. With fewer teachers working longer hours, the unions alleged that classroom sizes would increase, not decrease whilst the plan made only passing mention of the major issue of school violence and how to solve it. Additionally, the cost of longer school days and the inclusion of extra lessons at no extra cost to parents would place too great a strain on the already overtaxed Ministry of Education budget. Moreover, teachers felt that their representatives and those of parents had not included on the Dovrat committee or even consulted during the planning process and this was a major oversight on the part of the government since they are the main stakeholders and players in the public school system. Hence, unions threatened strikes and delays to the opening of the school term in a show of resistance (Yediot Achronot, 19 May 2005). Whilst the government is still intent on educational reform, it has since backtracked somewhat. The initiation of recommendations had been postponed for at least a year and a new government with a new Minister of Education has since taken office. The government has made promises to rehire some of the teachers made redundant and the status quo has remained.

2.10 Summary and Research Questions

A multitude of factors are involved in decision-making processes when parents contemplate suitable schools for their children. These factors include the socio-economic level of student populations, positive or negative opinions given by family, friends, and colleagues, school ideology, curricular content preferences, a child-centred curriculum, a pleasing and caring school atmosphere, orderly classrooms with emphasis paid to discipline and ease of access to the school. An important pull element toward a specific school is parental concern for the child's development of a community ethos. Parents as stakeholders who carefully consider the costs and perceived benefits of their choices employ the processes of Rational Choice Theory, although some parental decisions may be made chiefly as a result of emotional reactions to specific events that had occurred in their children's former schools or as reflections of cultural and religious beliefs. A push/pull model allowing for emotional and subjective factors may be applied to school choice processes when Israeli parents reject a particular public school and opt for a private international school. This research will explore the following two major questions:

What are the factors contributing to Israeli parental rejection of local public schools?

What are the attributes of an international school that influenced parental decisions to enrol their children in that school?

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.1 Research design

Chapter 3 will explain research methods used in this study. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the body of knowledge concerning Israeli parental determinants of choice at international schools. In doing so it is hoped to assist in the understanding of issues underpinning Israeli parental choice. Areas to be addressed in this chapter are the study setting, research design, research instruments, the sampling population, data collection procedures, and a framework for analysis. This study explores two main research questions:

1. What are the factors contributing to Israeli parental rejection of local public schools?
2. What are the attributes of an international school that influenced Israeli parental decisions to enrol their children in that school?

For this qualitative study, a case study method was chosen using an initial parental survey followed by personal interviews (Knight, 2002; Key, 1997). Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 237) describe a case study as 'a concentrated inquiry'. It examines a distinct entity in order to develop a better understanding of what is inherent in that entity (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994) case studies do not usually involve theory building or making generalizations to other cases, but provide an insight into one particular issue, in this case, the causes of Israeli parental rejection of public schools in favour of WBAIS and the tensions involved in parental decision making processes. As Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 237) state: *'the case is often looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinized, its ordinary activities detailed, because this helps us pursue the external interest.'* However, Yin (2003) disagrees with the assumption that case studies do not involve theory building; he contends that they may often be generalized to theory. Yin explains that in order to make generalizations across case studies *'an analyst should try to generalize findings to 'theory' analogous to the way a scientist generalizes from experimental results to*

theory' (Yin, 2003: 38). He believes that the development of theory is an essential part of a case study design '*whether the ensuing case study's purpose is to develop or test theory*' (Yin, 2003:28). In the case study presented here, a theoretical proposition to be investigated was whether the development of the English language was the decisive factor influencing local parents' enrolment decisions. This theoretical proposition arose out of previous research that had been carried out on local parental enrolment factors in other international schools by Mackenzie et al (2001; 2003). A rival theoretical proposition embedded in this case study design was that parental discontentment with public schools superseded the desire for an English language education as the paramount enrolment factor.

A descriptive design was chosen since it allows for a rich and varied text to be used in the case study to describe respondents' views and opinions of events that happened in the past (Scott & Usher, 1996). Key (1997: 1) defines descriptive research as a design that 'is used to obtain information concerning the current status of the phenomena to describe, "what exists" with respect to variables or conditions in a situation.' Little research exists relating to Israeli parental school choice determinants in the enrolment process at international schools (Mackenzie et al. 2001; Mackenzie et al 2003), and none relates to WBAIS.

3.2 Setting of the study

Currently there are only three private independent international schools in Israel; no public international schools exist in the country. Two of these international schools were established by church organisations but WBAIS is the sole secular international day school. It serves a multicultural student population largely from North America and from over fifty other countries, mostly from the diplomatic communities and foreign companies. WBAIS embodies the same attributes characteristic of private independent schools in western countries. Consequently, its population is composed of students from a medium to high economic bracket. Parents are charged tuition fees ranging from fourteen to sixteen thousand dollars a year, not including the cost of bus transportation and one time building fees. Most embassies and foreign companies cover the tuition fees for employees' children. Israeli parents customarily pay the tuition individually though some scholarships are awarded to middle and high school

families in need of financial assistance covering no more than fifty percent of annual tuition. According to a recent school board edict, local elementary aged children are no longer eligible for financial aid.

There are usually fourteen to twenty students in elementary and middle school grade level classes. In the elementary school students range from ages five to eleven and in middle schools from eleven to thirteen. A high school class may contain eight to fifteen students, ages fourteen to eighteen depending on grade level and content area. Owing to the school's small class sizes and the philosophy of education adopted by the school, students are able to receive individualised attention and instruction catered to their specific educational and emotional needs. Special services are offered to students through an English Language Learners' department (ELL) and a long established Special Educational Needs (SEN) department. After-school activities are available to students usually at no extra cost; most field trips and parties are included in the cost of the tuition. Much attention is placed on the aesthetic appearance of buildings and classrooms. Gardens are well planted and the exhibition of student work and projects is encouraged in classrooms and around the school premises. Respect for teachers and other students is expected. Appreciation for individual differences is encouraged in the curriculum and through modelling by teachers and administrators. Unacceptable student behaviours as violence in all its forms are dealt with firmly and immediately. Feedback from parents is encouraged and parental participation through volunteering in the classroom is advocated by the administration. All classrooms contain at least two computers while wireless laptop computers are available for use in all classrooms. Teachers at WBAIS are encouraged to integrate technology into their daily lessons.

Israeli parents who have bought into the philosophy of the international school are essentially opting out of the Israeli educational system. Those parents who have chosen WBAIS represent a heterogeneous group and reflect the cultural composition of the upper socio-economic bracket of Israeli society. Jewish immigrants, mainly from European countries and later from Arabic and North African countries, established the modern state of Israel. After the breakdown of the former Soviet Union, large influxes of Russian-speaking immigrants arrived from the Ukraine, Russia, Georgia and Uzbekistan and today make up about one sixth of Israel's total

population. The Law of Return guarantees Israeli citizenship to all Jews no matter their country of origin (Remennick, 2004; Eden & Kalekin-Fishman, 2002). There is a sizable population from the United States and British Commonwealth countries, residing mainly in the central and coastal areas of the country. Although Israeli families make-up only a small percentage of the international school community, most Israeli resident parents at the school are either native to Israel, come from Russian speaking countries, English speaking countries or are mixed native Hebrew-speaking and native English – speaking couples. There are several Israeli Arabs attending the school and few who are descendants of Jewish immigrants from North Africa or Arab countries. All have opted for Israeli citizenship and are therefore considered local for the purposes of this study no matter how recent their immigration. Some returning residents although Israeli born, had spent a considerable length of time abroad, generally in English speaking countries. A smaller percentage of local parents were native to Israel and may or may not have had experiences living outside of the country.

Israeli parents arrive with certain educational expectations for their children based on their own cultural values and experiences in other school systems. As a private school not under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, WBAIS has the prerogative to be selective in its enrolment practices. Administrators may choose to reject special needs students who they feel cannot be served by the programs at the school. Exceptions are made on an individual need basis for students who have no other educational alternative in the country (WBAIS, 2005).

3.3 Research instruments

3.3.1 The survey

A survey instrument was employed as a means of eliciting background information from local parents and receiving initial information about reasons for choice. The purpose of the survey was to prioritise parents' intentions and to get a basic feeling of the main issues involved in Israeli parental choice. Parents were asked to reflect on their reasons they choose WBAIS for their children. When deciding on which instruments would be most valuable to the study for the collection of data, the parents' level of English language proficiency was considered. Initially I had intended on using a survey in the style of a 'Likert forced choice' (Murray &

Lawrence, 2000) instrument using short declarative statements rather than open-ended questions. Likert surveys require no writing; memory and recall are controlled through response categories (Murray & Lawrence, 2000). By deleting a neutral category of responses, the researcher forces the respondent to make a choice from one of the other remaining categories (Murray & Lawrence, 2000). However, because Israeli parents possessed varying abilities in English, I decided to further alter responses for each statement. The purpose of the survey was to acquire an understanding of the general issues involved in their choices, not to obtain specific degrees of intensity. Respondents were not free to elaborate on any particular statement. Two response categories per statement, reason or not a reason were employed instead of a Likert three to five point scale. Thus, the survey was no longer a Likert scale but became a simple yes/no divide requesting parents to indicate whether or not the statements applied to their particular situations. Simplifying the instrument served as a benefit not only for those respondents with limited English proficiency but also for those with time constraints. The cover letter and survey assured the respondents' anonymity. The declarative statements in the survey were based on other surveys employed in studies of parental choice in international and bilingual schools reviewed in Chapter 2 (Mackenzie et al. 2003; Mackenzie et al. 2001; Potter & Hayden, 2004) but were revised to suit the particular Israeli population at WBAIS.

The survey and cover letter were translated into Hebrew and Russian to facilitate parental understanding for those parents possessing minimal English proficiency. These languages were chosen as they represented the languages spoken by the majority of Israeli parents at WBAIS who had identified themselves as Israeli nationals on their children's registration forms. There are four main language groups of Israeli families at the school: Russian speakers, Hebrew speakers, native English speakers and those speaking other European languages. Most European language speakers were bilingual in English as well as in their native languages. Russian was chosen because many of the Russian speaking families were essentially one-parent families in which the mother, the parent usually living with the children in Israel, lacked sufficient English knowledge. The few local Arab/Israeli families attending WBAIS were proficient in English or Hebrew as well as Arabic. The respondents

were directed to choose the survey in the language in which they felt most comfortable.

The survey was composed of two parts: Part One consisted of direct questions pertaining to the respondents' personal backgrounds. Questions about the respondents' place of birth, nationality, length of time living in Israel, numbers of children attending WBAIS and the grades their children began studying at the school were asked. Parents were questioned about their sources of information about the school; if they had received information through school visits, networking at work, through family members or friends, by way of school brochures, newspaper advertisements or the school website. Questions pertaining to parents' highest level of educational attainment and cultural affiliations were presented as optional items. (See Appendix B) The purpose of Part One was to acquire background knowledge about parents' language and cultural affiliations: if they were native to the country, former immigrants or newcomers. This was to enable the identification of possible variables for analysis.

Part Two focused on forty declarative statements answerable by placing a tick in the appropriate column. The statements focused on areas covering personal interest, academic, administrative and pastoral needs as well as campus aesthetics; however, these were placed in random order on the survey. Statements of personal interest included the following:

I wanted my child to learn English
I wanted my child to have an American-style education
I wanted my child to have an international education
We may be moving to another country in the future
I want my child to be able to enter a university in North America
Friends and family recommended WBAIS
I liked the kind of students at WBAIS
I attended an international school as a child

Academic concerns were composed of statements about curricular content and pedagogical issues:

WBAIS has a rigorous academic programme
Private schools offer a better education
WBAIS has high academic standards
The school has a special needs programme
The school offers a well-balanced curriculum
The school has a well-established ESOL programme
A private school offered a more effective education
There is good support for less-able students
The school has the Advanced Placement Programme in high school
I liked the school's homework policy
The school has a Hebrew language/ Israeli culture programme

The area of school management comprised the following statements:

I liked the small classes at WBAIS
The teachers are highly qualified
I was impressed with the orderly classroom atmosphere
I was impressed with the administrative staff
WBAIS is firm about discipline

The pastoral area focused on statements about school activities, parent-teacher, teacher-student and student-student relationships:

I wanted my child to be happy at school
My child was unhappy in the local school
My children were having difficulties in the local school
I liked the after-school activities programme
The students seemed friendly
My children wanted to attend WBAIS
Teachers seemed kind to their students
The staff seemed to be caring
The teachers have high expectations for the students

Facility-related statements concerned the physical appearance of buildings, its location, gardens and campus safety:

I was impressed with the school's facilities
The school is conveniently located
The WBAIS campus seemed safe and secure
I liked the gardens and playground facilities
The school is conveniently located
WBAIS is close to my home/place of work
The school offers a bus service to and from school

At the end of the statements, parents were requested to prioritise their five most important reasons for choosing WBAIS by recording the numbers of the appropriate statements in the spaces provided. Finally, respondents were questioned if they agreed to participate in personal interviews and if so, to write their telephone numbers for further contact (see Appendix B).

Before I could begin conducting research connected to the school and could obtain Israeli parent information, the survey needed be approved by the school board. Preceding its presentation to the school board, the survey had to be piloted and approved by the school's superintendent and elementary school principal to identify inaccuracies, confusing statements or statements deemed inappropriate by the administration. No changes were suggested. A cover letter was prepared introducing the researcher and describing the purpose of the study. The cover letter was translated into Hebrew and Russian as well as in English. The survey and cover letter were reviewed by the school board and permission granted. Once school board approval was obtained, parent lists of families who had identified themselves as Israeli citizens at the time of registration were released, and surveys were posted to their home addresses provided by school records.

Initially, the survey was sent by post to all Israeli parents regardless of the ages of their children. During the 2004-2005 academic year, seventy families were recognized as Israeli representing eighty to one hundred children. Parents were asked to return the surveys with their children or to deposit the survey into the researcher's post-box at school. After the first mailing, twenty-five surveys were returned. In order to increase the return rate, a second mailing was undertaken to parents who had not yet returned their surveys. In addition, polite reminders were given to parents through students or face-to face encounters on campus. After the second posting, thirty-six surveys had been received. A third mailing was undertaken to maximize returns; this time a self-addressed envelop was included with the survey and cover letter. Only elementary parents or parents whose children had begun studying at WBAIS during their elementary school years who had not yet responded received this final reminder. Another seven surveys were returned for a total of forty-three. Upon reviewing the survey data, I had decided to concentrate on parents of children ages five to thirteen. It became apparent that high school parents with children aged

fourteen to eighteen had a different set of issues from middle and elementary parents. Many of the children in high school had spent years abroad in English language environments and had not studied the national curriculum of Israel. Their parents stressed through their choices on the survey and by writing in several sentences of explanation that they felt their children needed to continue studying in an English language environment. They had not enough time left in high school to learn the subjects needed for the Israeli matriculation exams; neither could they improve their Hebrew language proficiency to the level needed for the exams in such a short time period. It became apparent from their choices on the surveys and from written-in comments that high school parents had predetermined that universities in North America afforded their children the most appropriate solutions for tertiary education. Therefore, the decision was taken to make the priorities of elementary and middle school parents whose children had begun studying at WBAIS during their primary years the foci of the study. For them the prospect of graduation loomed far into the distance.

During the beginning of the 2005-2006 academic year, an additional twenty new families were identified as Israeli with children aged five to eighteen. Surveys were posted to these families and eight were returned giving a total of fifty-one completed surveys. When returns were categorized by school, the majority of the respondents who returned surveys, thirty-eight of the fifty-one, had children in the elementary or middle schools. This may be attributed to the personal relationship that the researcher had established with these parents as their children's English teacher over the years.

The surveys were prioritised according to the number of times items were chosen as being a reason for enrolling their children in WBAIS, by the five most important factors chosen by all Israeli parents of children ages five to eighteen, and by the five most influential reasons chosen only by parents with children in the elementary or middle schools who had begun studying at WBAIS in the elementary grades.

3.3.2 The interviews

Background information acquired from the surveys allowed a sampling of prospective interviewees to be chosen reflecting the ethnic and cultural composition of local elementary and middle school parents. Personal interviews were chosen as a way of

delving deeper into the underlying meanings governing parental choices that could not be addressed in a written survey. The use of interviews allows the interviewee to expound and elaborate on matters that might not arise in informal conversations. The interviewer controls the topics and verbally monitors the speech situation of the interview, controlling the direction and flow of the conversations so respondents do not get off focus (Scott & Usher, 1996). In the survey, some issues relating to specific parental choices may not have been included or were not deemed relevant by the respondents. In the interview process, parents could elaborate on statements alluded to in the survey or on other personal school choice experiences that were not addressed.

Personal interviews may have been used as the sole method of data collection for this study with accompanying follow-up interviews. However, the survey was about establishing variables and aided the researcher in receiving initial data that could be used to compare choices according to national, cultural and educational backgrounds. Additionally, the survey enabled parents to indicate whether or not they wanted to participate in personal interviews. The interviews were about exploring in depth the process of choice and the interaction between conflicting reasons for choice.

Originally I had proposed to select a purposive sampling of parents for the interviews that would be representational of all the groups of Israeli parents at the school. Out of the thirty-eight respondents with children presently in the elementary school or had started studying in the elementary school but were now in middle school, there were fifteen parents who had agreed to be interviewed. When analysing the breakdown of those parents into cultural groups, I realized they were indeed representational of Israeli parents. There were six Russian-speaking parents, four of whom came from Russia and two from the Ukraine, two Europeans (one Swiss and one Austrian), four native Hebrew speakers, one Arab-Israeli, one native-English speaker from the United States, and one local faculty member. Two of the interviewees had had previous experience with international schools and one had graduated from WBAIS. Two of the respondents were fathers. Out of the fifteen prospective interviewees, thirteen interviews were completed. Two more interviews were arranged but were cancelled due to work-related commitments.

The interviews were prefaced with an explanation of the purpose of the research and parents were again assured of anonymity. Consent to tape-record the interviews was requested of all interviewees and all participants assented. Those parents who so desired were assured that they would be given an opportunity to review the completed research study.

The initial interview protocol consisted of ten questions based on statements ticked by the parents on the survey. The intention of the questions was to probe more deeply into the values underlying their reasons for choice; for example, to explore their personal experiences with the national school system before enrolling their children at WBAIS. The questions were piloted with two native Israeli parents. (See appendix C) The purpose of the pilot interviews was to see how parents responded to the questions; if they were clear or if any seemed ambiguous. I chose the two native Hebrew speaking parents to participate in the pilot interviews since they were frequently present on school grounds and it was easy to set up interview times. Following the pilot one of the questions '*Have recent reports of school violence influenced your decision to choose WBAIS?*' was felt to be a leading question so it was deleted from future interviews. If parents freely brought up the subject of violence in the public schools, then that area was probed further. The two pilot interviews were structured keeping to the protocol prepared by the interviewer. All following interviews were semi-structured to allow parents to elaborate on issues they felt needed more focus. Semi-structured interviews are grounded in predetermined theory and ideas but are flexible enough to allow respondents to develop their own points of view (Murray & Lawrence, 2000). Flexibility is necessary to allow for variability in the order of questioning, to follow up interesting leads and to clear up ambiguous statements or inconsistencies (Bryman, 2001). Additional questions were asked by the interviewer according to the direction of the subjects' discussions or if the parents seemed to be digressing into areas not connected with the foci of the study. Consequently, the interviews tended to take the form of focused conversations rather than formal interviews.

3.3.3 Background of the participants

The interviewees were divided into three groups:

1. **Native Israelis** including four native-born Hebrew speakers and one

Arabic speaker, an Arab/Israeli mother

2. **Russian language speakers** - one Russian- born mother, two Russian – born fathers, and two Ukrainian – born Russian speaking mothers
3. **Other language speakers** - two Western European – born mothers and one Northern European – born faculty member

Parents were categorized by their home languages and places of birth since this provided a means of comparing similarities and differences of determinants in relation to cultural backgrounds and inherent values. It was decided not to include English speakers as a separate group. Most of the native English speaking parents had children in the high school and it became clear from the survey responses, that high school parents clearly had special issues, e.g. the lack of time available for their children to study the Israeli national curriculum in the public schools and the inability for their children to develop their Hebrew literacy skills to the level needed to complete Israeli high school level coursework. One native English speaker parent with a child in the elementary school had agreed to be interviewed but had to cancel her appointments when they conflicted with business matters.

All parents had attained a level of education ranging from high school graduation to postgraduate degrees. The interviews with the Russian-speaking parents were conducted in English and/or Hebrew. One interview was conducted partially in Hebrew and Russian with the interviewee's daughter serving as translator from Russian to English. All other interviews were conducted in English or Hebrew, the languages spoken by the interviewer. All interviews were tape-recorded, translated into English and transcribed at a later date.

3.3.3.1 Russian speaking parents

Russian Speaker One (RSI) is a mother with one daughter presently studying in middle school but began her studies at WBAIS in the fourth grade. She lives with her daughter in Israel while the father resides in the Ukraine. Her daughter had attended a local school for three years. The mother and daughter entered Israel as new immigrants and received full citizenship and, therefore, are considered local residents.

Russian Speaker Two (RS2) also a mother, emigrated from the Ukraine with her two children. Her older son is in the high school while the daughter is presently in the elementary school. The son was placed at WBAIS from the first grade while the daughter entered in 2005. Before enrolling her daughter at the school she had been attending a local Israeli public school. The father has remained in the Ukraine.

Russian Speaker Three (RS3) is a mother who is newly arrived in Israel. She had spent four years in Israel previously but had returned to Moscow for many years. She lives with her two children while her husband has remained in Moscow due to work constraints. Both children had previous experience in Israeli schools.

Russian Speaker Four (RS4), a father, arrived in Israel with his family eight years ago from Russia. He is a mathematics teacher at a local Israeli high school and enrolled his daughter at WBAIS when she started first grade. His daughter had no previous experience in the Israeli public school system. She is now in the middle school.

Russian Speaker Five (RS5), a father, is a doctor who emigrated from Russian fifteen years previously. He lives with his wife, stepdaughter and younger son. His son has been attending WBAIS since the first grade. RS5 has not had any previous experience with Israeli schools.

3.3.3.2 Hebrew speakers

Hebrew Speaker One (HS1) is a mother with two children presently attending WBAIS, one in the elementary school and one in middle school. She has always lived in Israel but has never had her children in public schools. HS1 had established a Waldorf (Steiner) School but removed her oldest son from that school when other parents began to interfere in educational matters.

Hebrew Speakers Two (HS2), a mother, has one child in WBAIS who began studying in the third grade but is presently in the middle school. She and her husband have lived in Israel their entire lives and prior to their child's enrolment at WBAIS, the child had attended Israeli public schools.

Hebrew Speaker Three (HS3), also a mother, resides in a village in the central area of Israel and is an Arab-Israeli. She has two children in WBAIS. The children have been enrolled in the school since the beginning of elementary school. They are now studying in the middle and high schools. HS3 had lived in the United Kingdom with her family for several years while her husband pursued a graduate degree.

Hebrew Speaker Four (HS4) is a mother with one child presently in the elementary school. As a child she had lived in America for a year and had studied in England for four years. She and her native English-speaking partner lived in Moscow for a year where her child was enrolled in the British International School. Upon returning to Israel, her son had attended local public schools.

Hebrew Speaker Five (HS5), a mother, has two children studying in the middle school but entered WBAIS in the fourth grade. She had spent several years in the United States while pursuing a PhD degree. Prior to enrolling her children at WBAIS, they attended local public schools.

3.3.3.3 Other language speakers

Other Language Speaker One (OLS1), a mother, was born in Western Europe but periodically spent years living in Israel with her family. She had attended WBAIS as a child and presently has one child in the middle school. OLS1 enrolled her child in WBAIS at the start of fourth grade. Before attending WBAIS her child had attended local public schools. Although she had spent time in Israel periodically as a child, she considers her culture to be European although she has immigrated to Israel, is an Israeli citizen and resides in the country permanently.

Other Language Speaker Two (OLS2), also a mother, was born in Western Europe and attended international schools as a child in Europe. She lives in Israel on a permanent basis and holds Israeli citizenship. OLS2 has one child who started studying at WBAIS in the first grade. She has not had any personal experience with the local public school system.

Other Language Speaker Three (OLS3) is a mother who was born in Northern Europe but was raised in an English speaking country. She has one daughter presently in the

high school but had begun attending WBAIS from first grade. Prior to her enrolment in WBAIS, her daughter had attended an Israeli kindergarten.

3.4 Validity and reliability

During the process of selecting data collection procedures, validity and reliability was contemplated. In case studies, reliability is a contentious issue since data constituting lived experiences and beliefs are difficult to test empirically and are interpreted by the researcher. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argue that in qualitative research, validity of findings should be based on credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability rather than on the positivist criteria of reliability, internal and external validity. If this research were to be repeated with a different set of parents, one would expect a different set of answers although if the same parents who are representative of the local school population were interviewed by another researcher, one would expect to receive similar responses. These responses explore issues that the school might want or need to address. Yin (2003) contends that the goal of reliability in case study research is to reduce errors or bias. Bryman (2001:271) posits that validity and reliability in qualitative research is dependent on careful and prolonged observation as well as consistent and dependable transcriptions of tape recordings; therefore, full and complete transcriptions were undertaken soon after completion of the interview process to control inaccuracies and ensure dependable data through the registering of content and body language. Bryman (2001:272) states, 'the establishment of the credibility of findings entails both ensuring that research is carried out according to the canons of good practice'. One method of ensuring good practice is through dependability (Bryman, 2001). Dependability is attained through the maintenance of thorough record keeping and a comprehensive paper trail; therefore, copies of all correspondence and interview tapes were filed and stored.

The purpose of the study was not to make generalizations or to prove a hypothesis but to investigate the issues underlying parental choices. The thirteen interviews were conducted privately in a secluded classroom on school premises, mainly in the interviewer's classroom. The school was chosen as the venue for the interviews since parents were frequent visitors to the school. Israeli parents may have been open to having interviews in their homes but logistically, this proved to be difficult since

Israeli families at WBAIS live in all parts of the country, not in one particular area. Most of the parents fetched their children from school on certain days or volunteered in classrooms from time to time so it was far easier to arrange meetings on school premises that were mutually convenient for both the interviewees and the interviewer. Although having the interviews on school premises could potentially limit parents' eagerness to freely discuss negative aspects of the school, the interviews took place in a completely private location to put the interviewees at ease, to allow them to feel secure and to assure them that complete anonymity would be maintained. The thirteen interviews included the two pilot interviews since they involved native Hebrew speaking parents who had differing reasons for choosing an international school.

3.5 Position of the researcher

As a faculty member I have become acquainted with most of Israeli parents in the elementary and middle schools at WBAIS. As a long-time resident in Israel and as a parent of children who had attended both local public schools and WBAIS, I have been able to empathise with parental concerns and to understand the complexity of the emotional issues involved in the process of making school choice decisions. My experience as a parent of children who had attended local public schools and as a teacher who had worked briefly in the Israeli national system, had given me first-hand knowledge of the problems faced by local children and their parents in public schools. This personal knowledge of the complexity of the issues enabled me to establish a comfortable rapport with the interviewees that represented an advantage. We did not engage in the interview process as strangers since I had taught most of their children over the past years. Parents seemed pleased to participate in the interviews and were relaxed and in good spirits. Responses were understood as truthful since parents had no apparent reason to give untruthful ones.

This familiarity could also pose a potential problem since there was a danger that parents could have responded with answers they thought I wanted to hear. One of the dangers of conducting personal interviews is that interviewees may seek to please the interviewer with their responses (Murray & Lawrence, 2000), especially when there is a previously established relationship. My personal knowledge and closeness to the

complexities of the areas being investigated served as an advantage in interpreting the data since I had experienced the issues from positions as both parent and teacher in the local system and at WBAIS; but, I also recognised that my local knowledge and my position as the English teacher of the interviewees' children could introduce a bias into the study. I might influence the responses of the interviewees with my personal views or project my own feelings into the interviews. Awareness of potential bias encouraged me to step back and observe the interviewees from an emotional distance and not become personally involved in any of the discussions. I guarded against offering anecdotes of my own and my children's experiences. I also needed to phrase questions precisely, taking care not to ask leading questions. By being transparent in procedures and interpretations, I guarded against over bias. Whilst Knight (2002) contends that it is not possible for a researcher in descriptive or case studies to be wholly unbiased, awareness that aspects of the researcher's personality will emerge in the interviews helps to establish a sense of trust between the interviewer and interviewee.

3.6 The Framework of analysis

An adaptation of the Push/Pull Migration Theory (Thielemann, 2004; Peterson, 1968) provided a conceptual framework for categorising the survey and interview data that would allow the study to be compared to other studies already undertaken or to be undertaken in the future. An interpretive approach was employed since it was necessary to interpret what people revealed in their interview statements about why they chose the school and how they went about their decision-making processes. Rational Choice Theory (Bosetti, 2004; Scott, 2000; Scott, 1995) provided an essential framework for exploring and interpreting the parental decision making processes as they optimised the potential benefits of their decisions weighted against the perceived financial, emotional and ideological costs incurred by enrolling their children at an international school. Rational Choice Theory assumes that on a micro level, people take individual actions for their personal gain, that these actions are the optimal choices that can be taken given the opportunities available to individuals at a particular time. Individuals' actions are based on concern for their own welfare or the welfare of family members (Murray & Lawrence, 2000).

During the process of review after transcribing the interview data, I looked for obvious connections between the answers of the various respondents. These connections were colour-coded according to their apparent topic. After reviewing the interview data several themes had emerged that could be categorized using the concept of the Push/Pull Migration Theory. Push factors drawing parents away from the public school system involved facets parents perceived as the weaknesses of Israeli public education, e.g. inadequate attention to the special needs of their children, large unruly classes or dissatisfaction with the conduct of teachers and students. Smaller classes and a feeling of happiness motivating their children to attend school were examples of pull factors towards WBAIS. The aim of the analysis was to look for patterns of similarities or differences in regard to the parents' backgrounds and cultural groups, and to discover the underpinning emotions involved in their choices.

3.7 Summary

Chapter Three reviewed the methodology chosen for use in this study. Ninety local families were selected to receive the survey instrument during the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 academic years that had been previously piloted by two school administrators. Fifteen parents had volunteered for personal interviews, out of which thirteen were completed by June 2005. The interview protocol was piloted with two parents initially and a leading question was removed. Subsequent interviews were semi-structured allowing for increased focus on specific areas of interest or to qualify inconsistencies. Interview data was analysed by adapting the Push/Pull Model of Immigration and Rational Choice Theory.

CHAPTER 4

Findings and Data Analysis

4.1 Survey Data

4.1.1 Section 1 Sample Profile

Section I questioned respondents about their personal histories. Question twelve specifically focused on the respondents' educational background, their highest level of educational attainment, whether they had attended a public or private school as a child and their cultural affiliation although response to this question was optional. Thirty six respondents completed this question fully. Fourteen respondents opted not to complete the part about cultural affiliation while one respondent failed to fill out this question totally. Answers revealed a highly educated parent population; all respondents had received a minimum high school diploma level with the majority holding advanced academic degrees. Twenty of the fifty-one respondents identified themselves as native Israelis; the rest had immigrated to Israel from other countries. Fifteen parents originated from Russian speaking countries, mainly the Ukraine, Russia and Georgia. Sixteen parents had emigrated from English speaking countries in North America, Africa and Australasia; others came from Western and Eastern Europe. Thirteen respondents had children only in high school, seven had children in middle school, and the children of thirty-one of the respondents attended elementary school. Some middle and elementary parents had children attending high school as well. Eight of the parents who responded had more than one child attending different schools at WBAIS.

4.1.2 Section 2 Survey Statements

Initially, the survey findings were assessed according to straight counts of all choices made by all Israeli parents with children aged 5 to 18, (see Appendix B), of elementary and middle school parents, and of high school parents only.

Table 4.1 The Most Frequently Chosen Factors in Rank Order and by School

Divisions

The determinants as shown in Table 4.1 were tabulated in descending order according to the number of times the items were chosen as reasons. Percentages were not used in collating the data since percentage changes in a small sampling could be misleading.

Statement	Number total responses n=51	Rank	Number Elementary/Middle Responses (Rank) n=38	Number High school Responses (Rank) n=13
The teachers are highly qualified	43	1	34 (1)	9 (4)
I liked the small classes	43	1	34 (1)	9 (4)
I want my child(ren) to be happy at school	42	3	32 (3)	10 (2)
WBAIS has high academic standards	41	4	31 (6)	10(2)
The staff seem to be caring	40	5	31 (6)	9 (4)
I wanted my child to have an international education	39	6	32 (3)	7 (10)
I wanted my child to learn English	38	7	32 (3)	6 (18)
WBAIS has a rigorous academic programme	37	8	26 (6)	11 (1)
The teachers seemed kind to their students	36	9	29 (8)	7 (10)
I liked the multicultural mix of students	35	10	29 (8)	18) 6(
A private school offered a more effective education	33	11	27 (10)	6 (18)
Private schools offer a better education	33	11	27 (10)	6 (18)

Statement	Number total responses n=51	Rank	Number Elementary/Middle Responses (Rank) n=38	Number High school Responses (Rank) n=13
The school offers a well-balanced curriculum	33	11	25 (13)	8 (7)
WBAIS is firm about discipline	32	14	25 (13)	7 (10)
I was impressed with the orderly classroom atmosphere	32	14	26 (12)	6 (18)
I was impressed with the administrative staff	32	14	24 (15)	8 (7)
The WBAIS campus seemed safe and secure	31	17	24 (15)	7 (10)
I was impressed with the school's facilities	28	18	21(19)	7 (10)
I wanted my child (ren) to have an American-style education	28	18	22 (17)	6 (18)
My child(ren) wanted to attend WBAIS	27	20	19 (23)	8 (7)
The students seemed friendly	27	20	22 (17)	5 (26)
The school has a Hebrew / Israeli culture programme	26	22	20 (20)	6 (18)
The teachers have high expectations for their students	26	22	20 (20)	6 (18)
I want my child(ren) to be able to enter a university in North America	23	24	16 (14)	7 (10)

Statement	Number total responses n=51	Rank	Number Elementary/Middle Responses (Rank) n=38	Number High school Responses (Rank) n=13
The school has a well-established ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) programme	22	25	19 (23)	3 (31)
I liked the gardens and playground facilities	21	26	18 (25)	3 (31)
I liked the kind of students attending WBAIS	21	27	16 (26)	5 (26)
My child(ren) was (were) unhappy in the local school	21	27	14 (28)	7 (10)
Friends / family recommended WBAIS	20	29	20 (20)	0
The school has the Advanced Placement Programme in high school	20	29	13 (17)	7 (10)
I liked the school's homework policy	19	31	15 (27)	4 (29)
The school is conveniently located	16	32	13 (28)	3 (31)
The school has a special needs programme	15	33	10 (30)	5 (26)
My child(ren) was (were) having difficulties in the local schools	12	34	8 (33)	4 (29)
We will be moving to another country in the near future	12	34	11 (29)	1 (37)
There is good support for less - able students at WBAIS	12	34	9 (32)	3 (31)
WBAIS is close to my home / place of work	11	37	10 (30)	1(37)

Statement	Number total responses n=51	Rank	Number Elementary/Middle Responses (Rank) n=38	Number High school Responses (Rank) n=13
The school offers a bus service to and from school	11	37	8 (33)	3 (31)
I had no other choice	3	39	0	3 (31)
I attended an international school as a child	3	39	3 (35)	0

From the ranking it is clear that teacher quality and academic concerns (the first five choices) were the chief influencing factors, with highly qualified teachers and small classes being the most preferred determinants. The third and fifth most favoured factors dealt with humanistic concerns ranking second and fourth. The desires for their children to learn English or have an international or multicultural education were not the most frequently chosen factors by all respondents and placed sixth and seventh in rank order.

When divided into school groups, the desires for their children to learn English and to have an international education were again not the pre-eminent motivating factors toward enrolment in an international school. A solid and rigorous academic programme was more important to high school parents while highly qualified and caring teachers and small classes ranked highest with elementary and middle school parents. All groups considered the happiness of their children as an essential concern. Three high school parents wrote in personal comments describing how they felt they had no other options but WBAIS as additional statements (No.41). They felt their paramount reason was not specifically addressed in the body of Section 2. Some of the write-in statements were the following:

'Both girls (17 & 16) joined the school this year. Due to their ages and year in high school I saw no other choice but to send them to WBAIS.'

An Israeli born parent of high school age children felt her children would not be able to adjust to the Israeli system since they had spent most of their lives in North

America. Another respondent felt that since her child was used to studying in an international school setting it was beneficial for her to continue in the same kind of school system:

'Since my child had already studied in the international school system, it would be natural for her to continue in the same type of school'.

All the comments recorded in written-in statements were related to specific high school parents' desires to see that their children continue studying in English since their return from a lengthy sojourn abroad. Their children may not have maintained the level of literacy skills in Hebrew required for learning the Israeli curriculum or may have felt that the children had missed too much material to succeed in the national culminating high school matriculation (Bagrut) exams. Another Israeli-born mother with high school age children had recently returned to Israel from the United Kingdom, had tried enrolling her children in an Israeli school, but found the experience unsuitable. The opportunity for her children to continue studying in the English language was imperative. To accentuate that point she wrote out 'studying in English' in words instead of listing the number of the statement when asked to record the five most important factors in order of importance. This mother qualified her statement by adding:

My child 'already had 7th form in an Israeli school – but it didn't work out academically'.

Some native English-speaking parents had initially placed their children in the Israeli system but removed them when their children had expressed unhappiness or had difficulties coping with the Hebrew language and national curriculum. One mother of three children of high school and middle school ages wrote:

We had tried an Israeli school 'for our oldest son but once we tried WBAIS, we did not consider another school for our younger sons'.

When examining the cultural backgrounds of the respondents, three cultural or language groups suggested themselves: Russian speaking, native Hebrew speaking,

native English and other language speakers. During anecdotal discussions with parents over the year, some of the respondents had commented that they had partners of different nationalities which may have had a bearing on their decisions.

Table 4.2 highlights parents' five most important determinants when divided into language groups:

Table 4.2 The Five Most Chosen Factors by Language Group

Statement	Number total responses n=50	Rank	Number Russian speaker responses (Rank) n=15	Number Hebrew speakers responses (Rank) n=19 (One respondent failed to complete this section)	Number Other language speakers responses (Rank) n=16
I wanted my child to learn English	27	1	13 (1)	9 (1)	5 (3)
I wanted my children to have an international education	21	2	5 (3)	8 (3)	(1)8
I wanted my children to be happy at school.	19	3	6 (2)	8 (3)	5 (3)
I liked the small classes at WBAIS	18	4	4 (5)	9 (1)	5 (3)
The teachers are highly qualified	13	5	1 (7)	6 (5)	6 (2)
WBAIS has high academic standards	12	6	5 (3)	3 (12)	4 (5)
Private schools offer a better education	12	6	4 (5)	5 (6)	3 (7)
I like the mix of multicultural students	9	8	4 (5)	4 (10)	1 (15)

Statement	Number total responses n=50	Rank	Number Russian speaker responses (Rank) n=15	Number Hebrew speakers responses (Rank) n=19 (One respondent failed to complete this section)	Number Other language speakers responses (Rank) n=16
I want my child to be able to enter a university in North America	9	8	3 (8)	5 (6)	1 (15)
A private school offered a more effective education	8	10	0	5 (6)	3 (7)
My children were unhappy in the local school	8	10	1 (13)	5 (6)	2 (12)
My child(ren) wanted to attend WBAIS	8	10	5 (3)	2 (16)	1 (15)
The staff seem to be caring	7	13	1 (13)	3 (12)	3 (7)
The school offers a well-balanced curriculum	7	13	2 (11)	3 (12)	2 (12)
WBAIS has a rigorous academic program	6	15	2 (11)	1 (17)	3 (7)
Teachers seemed kind to their students	6	15	1 (13)	4 (10)	1 (15)
I was impressed with the orderly classroom atmosphere	4	17	0	0	4 (5)
WBAIS is firm about discipline	4	17	1 (13)	0	3 (7)
The WBAIS campus seemed safe and secure	4	17	3 (8)	0	1 (15)

Statement	Number total responses n=50	Rank	Number Russian speaker responses (Rank) n=15	Number Hebrew speakers responses (Rank) n=19 (One respondent failed to complete this section)	Number Other language speakers responses (Rank) n=16
The school has a well-established ESOL programme	3	20	3 (8)	0	0
We had no other choice (written-in #41)	3	20	0	3 (12)	0
My children were having difficulties in the local school	3	20	1 (13)	0	2 (12)

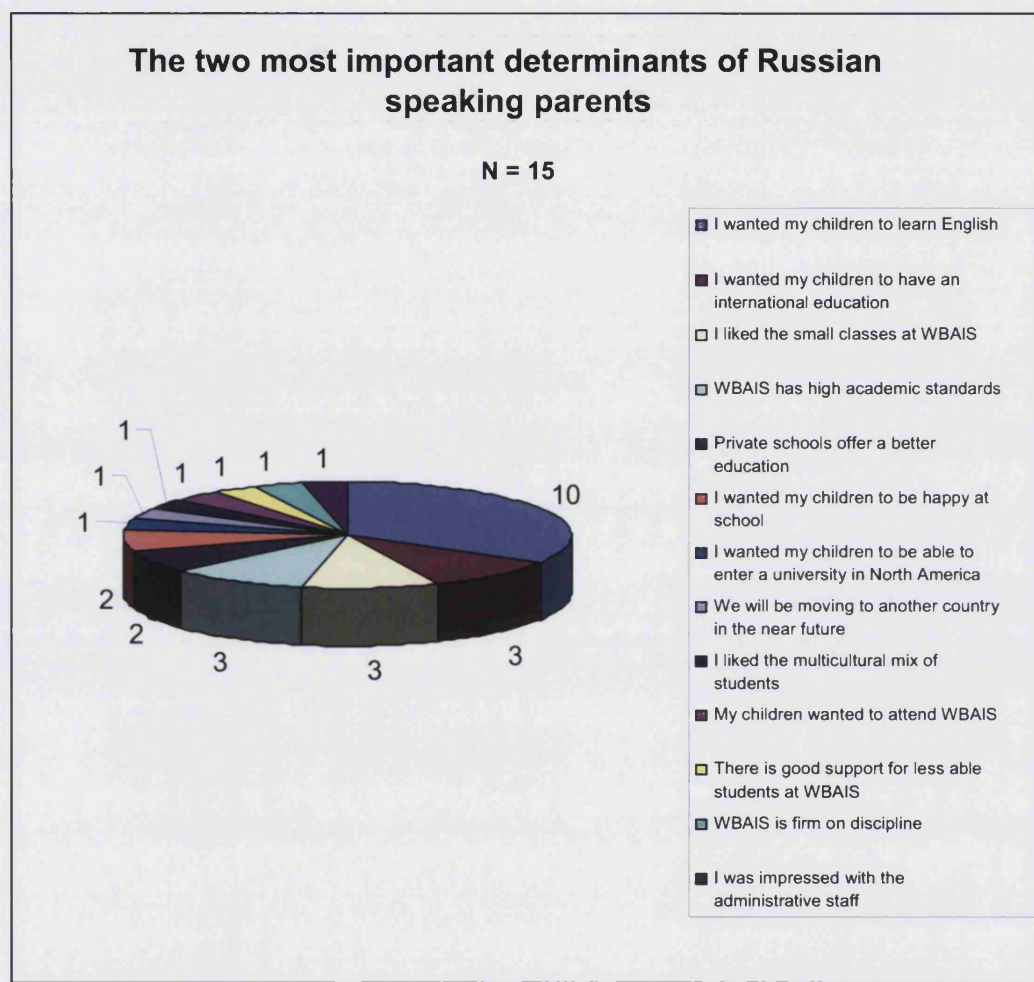
In total numbers of the five prime determinants, the desire for their children to learn English or learn in English and the desire for an international education were chosen most often with Russian parents overwhelmingly choosing it as their primary factor. Small classes and the happiness of their children were also deemed essential among the language groups.

The charts below illustrate the prime determinants selected by parents when grouped by culture and language.

Russian Speakers Top Enrolment Priorities

Figure 4.1 shows Russian speakers top priorities when only first and second choices are taken into account:

Figure 4.1

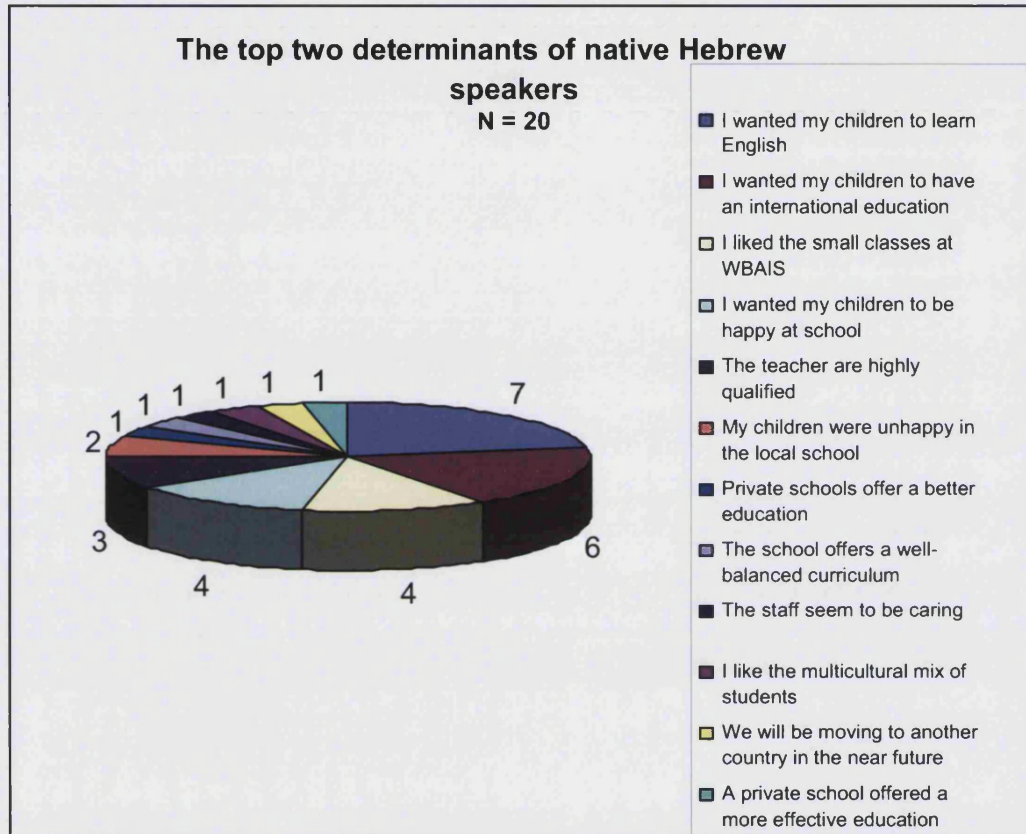


When Russian parents' two most paramount priorities were taken into account in an English curriculum again received the most responses with ten parents choosing it as most important; however, there was much variation among the other responses. It is clear that Russian-speaking parents' responses in the survey demonstrate that these parents consider the opportunity for their children to learn English as the essential factor in their enrolment decisions.

Hebrew Speakers Top Enrolment Priorities

This chart demonstrates native Hebrew speakers most important school choice priorities taking into account the respondents first and second choices only.

Figure 4.2

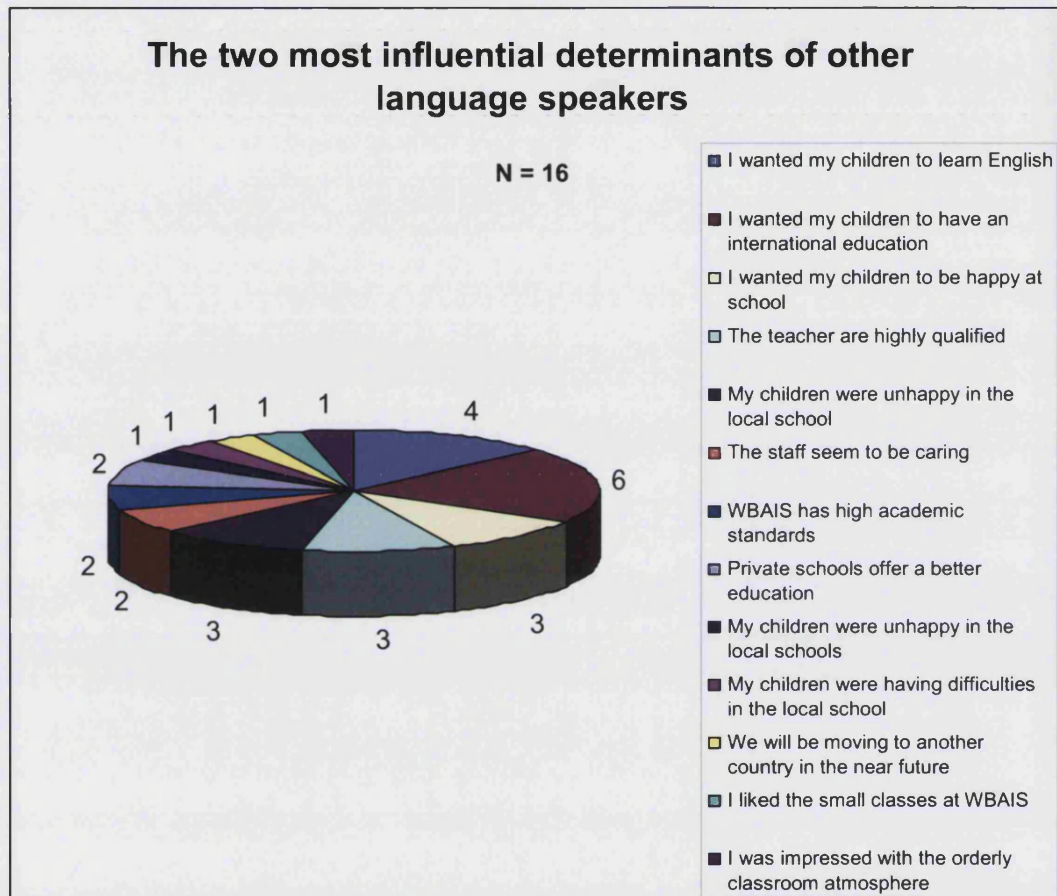


Native-born Israelis, like Russian speaking parents, acknowledged the desire for their children to learn English and have an international education as essential factors in their decisions, while the happiness of the child and the need for small classes were also deemed important considerations. Most of the other paramount determinants were varied with most receiving one response only.

Other Language Speakers Top Enrolment Priorities

The following chart illustrates the factors chosen by other language speakers as being of paramount importance when only their two most important choices were tabulated:

Figure 4.3



When the responses are broken down into their two most important choices, the desire for an international education received the most responses with the desire for their children to learn English second in rank. However, in this group, responses were divided among many determinants with none receiving more than six, most receiving two or three responses.

4.2 The interview data

4.2.1 Push and pull factors

It became apparent upon reviewing the interview data that certain concerns about public schools were expounded repeatedly by many interviewees irrespective of their home cultures and experience and served as push factors propelling parents away from the local school system. Parents voiced their opinions that public schools were not efficient because they did not function in a competent manner since staff had limited knowledge and resources to use to their children's advantage. Issues centred around perceptions that teachers in Israeli schools were poorly trained and equipped to handle large classes, that a weak or insignificant curriculum was being taught and that there was insufficient discipline in classrooms and on school premises. Furthermore, parents believed that excessive bullying was being perpetrated by students yet there was an inability or lack of desire by teachers and administrators to respond appropriately to violent behaviours. In addition, parents of children with special education needs felt that inadequate attention had been paid to their individual needs. Most of the interviewees espoused a belief that values being taught at Israeli schools conflicted with their own cultural and ethical mores. Many parents, especially those originating from Russian speaking countries expressed a conviction that public schools were inferior to private schools.

In contrast, they believed the opposite to be true at WBAIS. The attributes of WBAIS contributing pull factors towards the school mentioned by parents were the firm but kind discipline within classrooms and school grounds, the high degree the teachers' professional training, the support families received from school faculty and staff, the existence of a well organized and rigorous curriculum, individualized attention to the particular needs of students and a low tolerance for violence in all its forms.

However, while parents generally viewed WBAIS in a positive way, they were concerned about certain results of an international school education that would be detrimental to their children's future connections to Israeli society. By taking their children out of the Israeli school system, native Israeli parents feared they would be alienating their children from the place where they would most strongly develop a

sense of their own culture and language while newcomer citizens worried that they would be inhibiting their child's future development of a community ethos. Most parents felt that the best way they could maintain a sense of Israeli identity within their children was through the continued study of the Hebrew language and Israeli history and culture. These issues will be developed in more detail below.

4.2.1.1 Poor teacher preparation

Poor teacher preparation in Israeli schools was a major area of concern for parents and constituted a strong push factor away from the local school system. Parents maintained that their children's teachers had lacked training, especially in classroom management skills so teachers had been unable to cope with large classes. They also contended that teachers had lacked sufficient knowledge to teach curricular subjects. One Russian speaking mother stressed emphatically that her child had possessed more general knowledge than the teacher, even though her daughter had been extremely young when she attended a local school.

The teacher was a very young lady. She finished a three-month course for first grade and my daughter knew more than the teacher. They (teachers) didn't know a lot of stuff and they didn't know as much as my daughter.
(RS1)

A Hebrew speaking mother felt that teacher training programs had been deteriorating rapidly since her own school days.

I think the quality of the teachers, you know, now they just have to go to one course in one year. I have a friend who has a BA and she did one year at a teachers' seminar and she is now a teacher of 5th grade which is ridiculous, I think. So basically she has no experience; teachers actually should come to teach because of the right values, not just as a way to get a job. But this is my assumption... When I was in high school we used to say we were number one in math in the world (HS4)

Both parents maintained that training programs at teacher training institutions in Israel were too brief to provide competent educators. Parents believed that changing their children's public schools would not have resolved these issues since parents believed that incompetence among teachers existed across schools and districts.

I felt that they don't know much and I have to start to teach the school. I assumed the teacher knows a lot and then I realized that she doesn't. Now I

keep hearing that other parents start to have teachers coming to their houses to help the kids in first grade, in second grade, in math. Every family had like a group of helping teachers. (HS4)

4.2.1.2 A weak curriculum

Parents described the curriculum taught in public primary schools as facile and concentrated too heavily on Israeli and Jewish topics while global issues were virtually ignored. Russian speaking parents were especially concerned about the lack of a rigorous curriculum while Hebrew speaking parents desired a broader curriculum encompassing humanities, art and music studies in addition to science, math and Bible studies.

I do not agree with the curriculum in the Israeli system because I think it's very thin and I do not agree with the way they study Bible, math with forty kids in one class. (HS1)

They did not encourage them to read, they did not give them feedback... The problem was the third year when they really started to learn. It was not only the skills; it was the teaching, teaching the Bible for example. They had five hours of Bible a week and they studied only until 1:00. It was amazing! What was so important? (HS5)

Parents had emphasized that switching public schools would not have constituted a difference since the curriculum at all public schools was essentially the same as they had to follow the national curriculum.

In my opinion, the program for my daughter needed to be harder, more challenging ...She was in an Israeli school for three years and after that she was bored because they were teaching what she already knew. Their level was really low. (RS1)

In the Israeli school for my daughter was not so educational. The main reason I brought her here (WBAIS) was that she started to make remarks like 'only nerds are reading the books' and 'only gullible kids do homework'. (RS2)

4.2.1.3 A lack of discipline

Many parents, especially Russian speakers viewed the apparent lack of discipline in the Israeli schools as a major deficiency of the national school system. The Russian speaking parents had experienced a highly rigid system of education in their countries of origin where discipline had been strictly enforced. Upon visiting Israeli primary

institutions, Russian parents were confronted with what seemed to be a rule-less environment where chaos reigned.

In the Israeli school there was no discipline. In the Israeli school in first grade, the teacher could hardly be in the class because boys were screaming all the time- she could hardly teach. Already in the first grade in Israeli schools children could stop the lessons. (RS1)

It was like a zoo. For us it was terrible. (RS3)

Parents believed that it is imperative for children to learn to respect rules and to develop a sense of responsibility. Without discipline in the schools, that could not happen.

I knew that I had to give her another educational challenge, the obligations, the responsibilities, all the things she was not getting there (Israeli school). (RS2)

'Not enough information; not enough seriousness; big groups – forty or more for one teacher; not enough for teaching and all the time mess. I don't like it.' (RS5)

Parents from the other language groups including native Israelis also remarked about the lack of order in schools and the necessity of teachers to engage in shouting matches to be heard over the noise during lessons.

As an adult when we got married we rented an apartment just above an elementary school in our neighbourhood. From the first day I remember when we heard the shouting, the teachers shout, we decided our children would not go to this kind of school. (HS1)

4.2.1.4 Bullying and other forms of school violence

Fear and revulsion of bullying and other violent acts against children by peers constituted a major push factor swaying parents to opt out of the national school system. Many of the interviewees had had first hand knowledge of violent acts perpetrated against their own children or had heard about school violence committed against others from their own children or neighbours.

I could see that he was really scared during breaks. There were a lot of violent kids there. He used to come home and say this one hit this kid, this one had a knife and I used to ask, 'Didn't the teacher see? Where are the

teachers?' And he said, 'No, she was standing there but didn't see or she said something but didn't really deal with it.' They just gave up. (HS2)

We had a terrible experience in the Israeli school when he was little...My son is the kind of boy who is not a leader. For example, they took from him his schoolbag and threw all his things on the floor. He didn't know how to defend himself. (RS3)

Most of these parents took action by confronting teachers and administrators. They insisted that school staff punish the children responsible for violent acts; however, they did not feel that the persons in positions of authority took their complaints seriously or felt helpless to do anything about the incidents.

One day one kid threatened another girl with a knife and my child told me about it and I told her not to go to this class anymore. ...I went to the director and I told her what happened and the director said, 'Oh, it's not what you think. I'll call the company and they'll change the counsellor'. I said, 'This is not the only issue. You should do something about it. You should talk with the kids about it. You should give the kid a punishment. You should use it as an educational subject'. But nothing was done. (HS5)

Acts of violence included verbal threats, extortion, malicious acts, threats involving weapons and beatings.

They used to take away things from them; they used to demand money at the discotheque, and this was my small child, so they took out a few children and they said, 'Where is your money?' and they grabbed him like this. (She gestured by putting her hands around the back of her neck) (OLS1)

My neighbour was pretty badly beaten up by a boy in his school and the boy was from quite a rich family, and of course, they (the school) didn't do anything. (OLS2)

4.2.1.5 Unresponsiveness to individual student needs

Another leading area of concern expressed by many parents was the apparent inattention by teachers to the individual education needs of the students. Some parents attributed this inattention to the inability of the teacher to contend with the overly large class populations at public schools. Others felt the teachers were simply unconcerned or lacked the knowledge and training to successfully use teaching strategies for children with SEN needs.

It's considered one of the best schools here and in a good area. He didn't learn much and I realized that the teacher doesn't see him at all...I realized that there was actually a writing problem. I showed it (a privately initiated assessment) to the school and the teacher said, ' Oh, no, he doesn't have any writing problem.' I asked the supervisor and he said everything was fine and, of course, there was a problem. (HS4)

The real reason when it came down to it that I brought her here was I found out that she had special learning needs and I was fearful that her needs wouldn't be addressed in the Israeli school. ...She needed to be in a different framework and not just in an Israeli school....just from the neighbourhood people whose children attended that school, they told me they had forty children to a class with one teacher and if a child had any kind of special need it was unlikely to be attended to the way it could be at AIS. (OLS3)

Parents articulated the feeling that they were frequently blamed for their children's difficulties and that the responsibility for their children's academic success lay solely with them.

She said that my son needs to be strong. He needs to take care of himself and I said that not all children are the same. Why does he need to take care of himself? What are you there for? ...'No you are doing horrible things', she said to me 'and your son will be like a girl not a boy'...She said ' let him take care of himself, be independent'. (RS3)

They always pushed the ball in our hands, like it's our responsibility. In the last years, very typical of Israeli society, everyone's pushing the responsibility to somebody else and I see it as symptomatic of Israeli society...The main thing that bothered me there (Israeli school) is that they didn't pay attention, nobody gave a damn, and also it was always the parents' problem if something was wrong in school. (HS2)

4.2.1.6 A clash of cultural / moral / ethical values

The majority of the interviewees expressed views that the values or lack of values imparted to students in the Israeli public system were at odds with their own personal and cultural mores.

There are aspects of the Israeli society that I don't particularly enjoy... dare I say the 'moral standard', the ethical standard, the value systems of the families whose friend my daughter chooses to be are much more akin to mine than the Israeli families in our neighbourhood. (OLS3)

It is understandable that new immigrants to a country might have initial difficulties with that country's value system if that system was disparate from the one from which they had emigrated.

If there is no discipline, then it is a problem for the rest of your life. At home we always told our daughter to learn, to get good grades and we teach her a lot. When she went to the Israeli school, she didn't do homework. (RS1)

I always say to my children that they must be respectful of other people. In the Israeli school it wasn't like that at all. (RS3)

However, Israeli born parents also related a dissonance between their own personal beliefs and those being transmitted explicitly or implicitly at local public schools.

I feel like, you know, the prisoners of Zion in Russia - that is what I feel like in my country. I do not agree with nothing that's going on, not the political system, the economic system, so I feel a prisoner in my country. So when I put my sons in this school, I feel it's my only ability to feel free in my country. (HS1)

Disparities existed concerning parental beliefs about the treatment of children.

In the Arab schools the education is very low, not only the education system, it's also how they treat kids, the way that they look at kids. It's not the attitude that me and my husband have. You have to look at the kids and others and treat them the same way. They will soon be an adult and treat them the same way; but the way they treat them in Arab schools is not good for us. It's not what we believe. (HS3)

Different attitudes existed concerning the appreciation of personal responsibility and respect for diverse cultures and differences.

You know, the Israeli way of thinking is if you have a little bit of money you can (pauses) My neighbour was pretty badly beaten up by a boy in his school and the boy was from quite a rich family, and of course, they (the school) didn't do anything. I heard the parents were disgusting, but I don't think you should get away with things because your name is ... (OLS1)

There was a little problem with guys - that many Israeli guys said to her, 'Ooo, from Russia' (in a derogatory tone). My sister has two daughters that learned from the beginning in a normal Israeli school and I saw what was an Israeli school first of all. Second, if somebody makes immigration, it changes your mind. I'm not sure for you because you lived in an open country, you moved

easy. But for us it's ten times more difficult because we lived in a closed country- everything is different so we changed all our life. (RS5)

4.2.1.7 Private schools are better than public schools

A conviction discussed by parents, especially those parents who had been raised in countries formerly under Communist control, was the belief that private schools were essentially superior to public schools.

The point is that it's private and the difference between private and not private is dramatic. First of all, the number of children in the class - in an Israeli school there is an average of forty children in a class, a large number. Secondly, in a private school the teachers can pay individual attention to each student much more. There are some more reasons. In a private school there is a possibility to choose the best teachers from a professional and economic level. That has an effect on the students no doubt. (RS4)

The reason given by parents encompassed feelings that teachers at private schools were more capable of providing individualised instruction due to smaller classes.

In a private school I can be sure that my daughter is getting all the attention she needs because at the Israeli school there were thirty-two students in her class. (RS2)

Parents believed that teachers received more comprehensive teacher training and continued professional development in private schools. Additionally, teachers and administrators at private schools were inclined to encourage parents to take active roles in their children's education. Parents expressed their impressions that teachers at private schools were accessible and empathetic to students and parental concerns.

Russian speaking parents espoused the belief that private schools offered an effective and high standard curricula, and that children at private schools were disciplined and respectful of others. Russian speaking parents had never experienced private schools during their own childhoods since all schools in the former Soviet Union had been public. They were grateful for the opportunity to choose a private school for their children.

There are no private Israeli schools, only public ones. I don't want her to hang out with Israeli kids... but if I didn't have the money to pay for this

school I would do everything so my child could go to a private, not a public school – maybe in Switzerland or London. When I die I want to leave my children not just money, but with a good education. (RS1)

4.2.2 The advantages / pull factors of an international school

All parents expressed similar views about the benefits of enrolling their children at WBAIS. These benefits represented the antithesis of the perceived weaknesses and faults of Israeli public schools, namely, small classes instead of large, individualised instruction and caring teachers as opposed to uncaring and ill-trained ones and a strong and broad curriculum as opposed to a weak and ethnocentric curriculum.

The level is a lot higher than in the Israeli school. I think that this school would be good for her because it's more challenging...Here the parents have a good education and the kids do too. And they believe in the importance of education that they don't have in the Israeli schools. Israeli parents don't care about their kids' education... There is discipline in this school. (RS1)

Another advantage is the smaller class sizes, approachable and open teachers. Again perhaps more so because I'm a staff member I felt I had an address to turn to and perhaps in the Israeli system I might not have found it so easy. (OLS3)

Parents appreciated the firm but kind discipline exemplified in classes and on school premises, the quick feedback from teachers and the encouragement parents were given to take an active part in the school community.

The atmosphere gives the child opportunities to learn. (HS1)

The big advantage is the dignity and interest that they feel here, the encouragement, learning how to learn, believing in the abilities, getting good feedback- nobody shouts at them except their parents. (HS5)

I like very much the atmosphere and I like something that you might find strange, I don't like buildings like prisons. I like campus buildings that are low, one story, not too much severity... I like most of the parents here. I look at how they get along and it's good. Here it opens up the world because with Hebrew I don't know where else in the world it's good. (HS2)

Some respondents believed that the diverse school population at WBAIS was advantageous to their child's development.

Here they know that there are other kids in the world whose colour is different, their language is different, and their religion is different. So first of all, there is respect for others at this school. They have to be patient with each other, to respect other people and they will get respect. (HS4)

I like the feeling of belonging and responsibility and I really appreciate the diversity because it's important to feel how we're different and to respond to any kind of individuals. (RS2)

Others thought the chance to become fluent in English would open up their future prospects.

'The most important is English because if you have the English language it opens you to the world.' ... I think as well for higher education in the future, maybe for work in the future for them to know Arabic and Hebrew and English in the Middle East - I think they will have many more opportunities, work wise or education wise. (HS3)

4.2.3 The disadvantages/push factors of an international school education

The perceived disadvantages of an international school like WBAIS may serve as push factors discouraging parents from opting out of the local system. The interview participants had deep concerns about these issues but concluded that the benefits of WBAIS far outweighed the disadvantages. These disadvantages encompassed cultural, social/emotional and language factors.

4.2.3.1 Cultural factors

Parents voiced particular concerns that a private and international school education at WBAIS would alienate their children from Israeli society and would create confusion about their children's identity.

First of all they are far away a little bit from the Arabic culture and that makes them as well, how to say – they don't know who they are. Am I Israeli? Am I Palestinian? Am I American? They're kind of caught in-between. (HS3)

I know that a year ago they (other Israeli parents) were trying to arrange something with scouts. He was going on Saturday and when I picked him up he said he didn't feel he belonged there. He said, 'All those Israeli kids, they were shouting and screaming.' I said, 'You are an Israeli kid as well but I

realize you might have a problem with that. You will have to find your connection.' (HS2)

The fact that is we consider ourselves Israelis. We chose to live here; we're making our life in Israel. Israel is a very important part of our lives. I have to supplement that; for example, for her Hebrew because of her dyslexia it was suggested that she get extra Hebrew lessons, which we did... She does have a clear understanding of who she is in our family in Israel but she is not part of the larger community. (OLS3)

4.2.3.2 Social/emotional factors

Parents feared their children would have difficulty creating long-lasting social relationships, the kind that they had experienced in their own childhoods due to the transient nature of the school population.

I was talking about it to my partner yesterday that socially I still have friends that I had from elementary school and they're still my friends. This is something that is a bit scary for me culturally, socially, the fact that the ability to develop social skills, to bond with another friend like we used to do – I'm afraid this won't happen... I took upon myself a huge responsibility in a way by confusing him instead of keeping him in the Israeli culture. I'm actually confusing him by turning him into an international kid on account of this, but I'm not sure what is more important. (HS4)

An additional problem inhibiting the formation of close friendships was the distances between places of residence. Some interviewees related how difficult it was for their children to socialize with peers on weekends and during holidays.

I think the major disadvantage is the social aspect. She has a group of friends that shifts and changes ...but these girls that she enjoys as classmates also live far away from us so socially it's more challenging. (OLS3)

4.2.3.3 Language factors

Most of the interview participants were apprehensive about their children's loss of the Hebrew language or their difficulty in acquiring a high level of proficiency. Although the school offers Hebrew to children, the choice to take Hebrew is elective. It is offered on a native speaker level, but is only given for forty-five minutes every other day. Many parents felt that the program was not sufficient to maintain their child's language level and they needed to supplement lessons with private tutoring.

The level is too low but we're taking it, Hebrew. I want her to continue. My child is perfect in reading and writing Hebrew; there is not one mistake. It's unbelievable and this is something I want to maintain. She is reading one book in Hebrew and one book in English because I don't want to lose the Hebrew. I want her to continue to know Hebrew because we are Israelis. (OLS1)

I don't think they get enough Hebrew and Israeli culture. And we are starting somehow to correct it. We (Israeli parents) want to give some classes in Hebrew and Israeli culture on Sunday mornings. Although it will cost money, I think it's the right thing to do. Also there's the issue of friends – a big issue. It's true there are nice kids here - but it's only during the weekends that the meeting between the children is more difficult. (HS5)

Russian speaking parents were just as concerned as their Hebrew speaking counterparts since they understood that their children had less of a background in the Hebrew language and would lose their proficiency levels quickly.

They are living here and the language is one of the most important things and Hebrew here - it's not enough. (RS5)

4.3 Summary

Chapter 4 presented the findings of the Israeli parental survey and personal interviews. The results were obtained from fifty-one parents of children ages five through eighteen attending WBAIS in grades kindergarten through twelfth who returned completed surveys, and from thirteen elementary and middle school parents who agreed to participate in personal interviews. The survey data and interviews were categorized by school and language groups. The interview data was presented according to areas of concern parents articulated about local schools and their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of placing their children in an international school setting. Chapter Five will discuss the implications of the findings in relation to the individual language groups and the theories used for analysis: the Push/Pull Theory and Rational Choice Theory.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion of Findings

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 will discuss the implications of the research in relation to the major research questions and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

5.2 Discussion

International schools similar to that in the study have developed to satisfy the educational needs of a diverse expatriate population. Local schools are generally unsuitable for temporary sojourners since the language of instruction may be unfamiliar and largely unusable for students who will be returning to their home countries or moving on to other postings after a few years (Mackenzie et al, 2003). Mackenzie et al (2001, 2003) have also shown that members of the local community who elect to send their children to international schools often do so because they perceive the school to be prestigious, empowering and a means towards future high salaried employment opportunities. Since high tuition fees are often levied, only economically elite local families can afford to enrol their children at these schools, even when partial financing is available. Other local families who would like to provide a private international school education for their children are limited by the substantial fees. Consequently, equity in relation to socio-economic status is not an issue as it is in public school choice in national systems. Since no governmental assistance is available for Israeli families at WBAIS, those who do attend tend to be children of well-educated professionals in an upper socio-economic bracket possessing adequate financial means.

5.2.1 Survey bias

Although surveys were sent to all Israeli parents at WBAIS with children ages five to eighteen regardless of gender, more surveys were completed and returned by mothers than fathers. Only in one case did both parents complete separate surveys; consequently, most surveys were biased toward the mothers' beliefs. Both fathers who completed the survey were Russian speaking. As mentioned in Chapter 4 Russian speaking fathers tended to be more proficient in English than their spouses;

consequently, they were more comfortable attending to school-related matters. Most of the Russian speaking mothers who completed the survey were heads of one-parent families and had no alternative but to attend school meetings for their children. Maternal roles in Jewish and Arab cultures have traditionally involved daily childcare and education duties while the husband's role has been that of breadwinner. Although most of the mothers who participated in the study were highly educated they maintained the caregiver role for their children. A few mothers who did not work outside their homes had time to volunteer at school, either by joining the Parent-Teacher Association or by helping out in classrooms. It is especially common for mothers of expatriate students to spend a great portion of their time at international schools. They are normally the accompanying spouses; while their husbands work at their embassies or offices, the wives fill their free time volunteering in classrooms or meeting acquaintances on campus. Mackenie et al (2003) hypothesized that the dominance of mothers' responses to their surveys reflected the situation in which mothers in internationally mobile families are often restricted from working by host country laws. Therefore, they focus their time and energies on their children's education and were often on school premises. This was not the case with many of the Israeli mothers participating in this study. They were working professionals who needed to take time from their jobs to attend to school matters. More mothers tended to reschedule their employment duties to attend school meetings and functions than did fathers. In most cultures, children's educational matters are viewed traditionally as being within a woman's domain. David (1993) contends that little has changed over the years in regard to mothers' roles in education. Mothers' roles are seen by females as historically constructed. She contends, however, that expectations for women to take a major role in educational activities at home and at school have created conflicts among employed mothers and have often led to confusion. Mothers are not always available when school activities take place or when teachers request the mothers' presence. While women possess opportunities for employment and the composition of the family unit may have changed, parents and teachers continue to regard the daily welfare of the children, including their education to be the woman's prerogative. In this study the word 'parents' is used to refer to the sample population; however, I acknowledge that the participants who completed surveys and personal interviews were mostly mothers.

5.2.2 What are the factors contributing to Israeli parental rejection of local public schools?

Upon immigrating to the country or upon their return to Israel from a sojourn abroad, many of the parents who participated in the study had initially placed their children in Israeli public schools. They had chosen to make Israel their home and felt their children would be best served in an Israeli environment where they would adapt most easily to Israeli culture. Being in an Israeli school would also assist their acquisition of the Hebrew language. It was through their children's negative school experiences that Israelis became truly disillusioned with public schools. These experiences coloured their resolve concerning local schools' unsuitability in providing their children with what they considered to be a solid high-level education. Parents who were more knowledgeable about their local communities had attempted to keep their children in the Israeli system by investigating possible alternatives. Some parents, especially native Hebrew speakers and English language speakers reported that they had examined other alternative public schools, some outside their catchments before making their school choice decisions. During their deliberations, they considered the suitability of the school populations, the sizes of the classes, the availability of special education programs (SEN) and the convenience of the locations. Most parents reported that they had not found schools matching their children's individual requirements. One parent had found an appropriate school in a different locality but enrolment there would have demanded relocation. After careful deliberation, this parent and her spouse decided moving would be too great an inconvenience as far as their workplaces were concerned.

The kind of student populations deemed acceptable by parents surfaced in another interview when a parent related how she had rejected the idea of sending her child to a local public middle school owing to her dislike of the official integration policy. She felt her child would be mixing with the 'wrong kind' of Israeli child, meaning those from underprivileged neighbourhoods. Yonah (2000) contends that school choice in Israel is a method parents use to negate the effects of the integration policy. The actions of this mother seem to support his contention, although she was the only parent to directly refer to the official policy. At the same time, two other parents who were concerned with the quality of the student-body composition at schools they had investigated cited the multicultural atmosphere and diversity of nationalities at

WBAIS as being beneficial for their children. Teelken (1999) argues that school choice is often based on the parental desire for their children to study with pupils from an acceptable school population, that is, those coming from families with a high socio-economic status. With the parents described above, this seems to be relevant and part of the benefits they attribute to WBAIS.

Many of the parents interviewed for the study reported that they had carefully considered the choices available to them before making their school choice decisions. A few parents had considered alternative language-based schools as the French school in Jaffa, a mainly Arab Israeli populated area near Tel Aviv. Two other parents had investigated an international school in Jaffa. One parent had rejected the idea when friends and acquaintances informed her that the school was connected to a church organization. The other parent determined that the makeup of the school population was unacceptable. He explained that he did not feel the students who lived in the area were the type he desired as his son's classmates: *It was more British but the area is not so good. The people that live there are not so good - also the students and teachers, everyone.*

5.2.3 The push factors

As mentioned in Chapter 2, when the Push/Pull Theory is adapted to school choice, it implies that certain factors push parents away from a particular school. The survey and interview data revealed that specific characteristics of Israeli public schools were perceived as unsatisfactory by the parent groups participating in this study. Although the public school system had once been held in high regard by some parents who had related positive experiences at public schools during their own childhoods, they were now considered to be in a state of deterioration, not only in affective areas but also in curricular content and teacher quality. Public school children were characterized as undisciplined and ill-mannered. Other Israeli parents were seen as lacking interest in the quality of their children's education. Teachers and administrators were described as poorly prepared and unable to attend to students' needs and to punish violent behaviours. The curriculum at public schools was perceived as too ethnocentric and did not prepare students for life experiences. A major push factor seemed to be a clash of personal and cultural values embodied in the public school system. While persistent news reports in the local media focused on issues of poor teacher

preparation, overcrowded and chaotic classrooms, peer violence and violent acts against teachers and administrators, what is the reality of the situation in public schools?

5.2.3.1 School violence

School violence was a worrying matter for parents interviewed for this study. Parents were not queried about violence but the topic was brought up repeatedly by parents when they reflected on their children's own personal experiences in public schools. These violent incidents related by parents served as strong reasons parents removed their children from the public school system. Perhaps parents were reacting to or were influenced by the persistent media reports about the ills of the education system appearing frequently in the daily newspapers; newspapers have continually focused on violent behaviours perpetrated by students against peers, students against teachers, teachers against students and parents against teachers, even involving primary aged children carrying knives to school (Maxwell, 1999). In their interviews, many parents related their children's personal brushes with violence in their particular public schools. Violence in the schools was a reality for them; it constituted a major concern and caused parents a great deal of anxiety for their children's safety. A violent school atmosphere did not characterize the humane and empathetic environment in which parents wished their children to be immersed.

Parents felt that teachers in the Israeli public schools were trying to shirk classroom and academic responsibilities and place the burden on parents, and this was seen as symptomatic of Israeli society in general. People were not accountable for their actions and this lack of responsibility was transferred to children. Violence in all its manifestations was viewed as an accepted part of the culture; teachers and parents in public schools believed children needed to come to terms with this part of life (Maxwell, 1999). Children were taught from an early age to respond to violence with more violence. This propensity towards violence has been highlighted in recent international and Israeli surveys about the problem (Hoffman, 2000).

Newspapers and other forms of media tend to stereotype and create sensationalism to sell papers and lure viewers; the truth, however, may not be so extreme. Nevertheless, the inability or disinterest among public school teachers and

administrators to attend to violent behaviours was mentioned repeatedly by Israeli parents as a failure of public schools. In research on the characteristics of effective schools (Fertig; 2000; Blandford & Shaw, 2001), the capacity of teachers and administrators to serve as active role models for their students was considered to be highly indicative of efficient schools. In interviews, Israeli parents expressed deep concerns that public school administrators and teachers had failed their children in this area.

5.2.3.2 Poorly trained teachers

The perception that teachers were poorly trained and uninformed about the subjects they were hired to teach constituted an important push factor compelling parents to reject local schools. Not only were teachers and administrators unresponsive, they did not seem well versed in the subjects they were required to teach. Parents perceived the Israeli teacher-training program as being too brief and did not teach prospective teachers how to manage large public school classes. One parent hypothesized that overlarge classes and under trained teachers contributed to an environment where educators had difficulty remaining informed about all their students, especially the unobtrusive individuals. It is true that teacher-training programs in the past had been brief constituting only one year in duration; however, this applied only to those individuals who already possessed a first degree in a content area subject or had attended teacher training programs during their army service. It is also true that in the past teachers in the primary grades did not need to possess a first degree in a content area subject. Today prospective teachers holding a bachelor's degree must complete a minimum two-year training program. Other candidates at teacher training seminars are required to complete three years of training plus a year of student teaching leading to a first degree in education before receiving their teaching licenses. This training process has existed for approximately five years.

In order to get an idea of how true parental perspectives concerning teacher training programs were I decided to discuss their views with a teacher trainer at a preparatory college in the north of Israel. She (Ravid, 2006) believes that the main problem with Israeli teachers graduating from teacher training facilities is not the teacher training program, its content or length but with the decline of the quality of candidates seeking to become teachers during recent years. She considers the training program at her

institution to be rigorous with a focused curriculum embodying clear educational goals. In her experience, recent candidates in general appear to have lower cognitive abilities than in the past and lack well developed language, critical thinking and social skills. Their motivation seems to be purely functional, that is, to gain steady employment. They are not interested in becoming highly knowledgeable and professional educators. She sees it as a recruitment problem and attributes the present lack of high quality candidates to dismal teacher salaries and working conditions. The more capable and talented students are attracted to higher paying professions such as in technical industries that are able to offer their employees substantial salaries and bonuses. However, she feels that from her experiences as a teacher trainer in Israel for the last six years, those teacher trainees who already possess a first degree tend to be motivated and become well-informed professional educators. She does, however, believe that one area of deficiency in teacher training programs is in the area of special education needs. Teachers receive minimal instruction in attending to the individual needs of those students requiring special assistance. Although views about the quality of teacher training programs are debatable, parental perspectives on this issue influenced their choice of school.

5.2.3.3 Lack of firm discipline

The interview findings revealed that Russian-speaking parents were extremely concerned with the apparent lack of firm discipline in Israeli classrooms. Parents repeatedly discussed their perceptions that discipline was non-existent in public school classrooms and that they liked the kind but firm discipline they observed at WBAIS. Interestingly, the survey statement, 'WBAIS is firm on discipline' was not cited by Russian speaking parents' as a primary reason for choosing the school. It certainly was not given the same intensity of importance on the survey as it was during the interviews; in fact, none of the Russian parents chose this statement as their prime school choice determinant, although it was listed by one parent as a second factor. It did not seem a major pull determinant for choosing an international school, yet interviewees frequently espoused their shock and disbelief at the apparent lack of any discipline in the Israeli schools their children had attended. Thus it served as a major push factor from public schools.

In the interviews the intensity of Russian speaking parents' feelings about discipline was readily visible; it permeated their discussions and descriptions of their children's experiences in their Israeli schools. Russian speaking parents related how they were used to a highly structured educational system where strict codes of conduct were enforced. In Israeli schools, classes seemed to parents to be devoid of disciplinary rules altogether. Teachers barely could be heard above the noise of screaming children. Rules were non-existent or were not stressed and teachers failed to check homework assignments on a regular basis.

While it would appear at times that there is minimal discipline in Israeli classrooms, the reality is that it is a different disciplinary system, one that is relaxed and lenient when compared to the rigid educational system in former Soviet bloc countries. Students address their teachers by their teachers' given names rather than family names which seem to counter some Russian speaking parents' conception of proper etiquette, but rules do exist in Israeli schools and are often displayed in classrooms.

However, the ability to enforce class rules is dependent on the class management skills of the individual teacher and needs the support of the schools' principal and parents. Many times Israeli parents are unwilling to support a teacher over their children when corrective disciplinary measures are required. Often the teacher and principal feel compelled to retreat from their position over disciplinary issues when parents become defensive or aggressive about their children's indiscretions. Maintaining discipline in larger classes may be more difficult than in small classes, especially for newly qualified teachers. One teacher without a teaching assistant has responsibility for a class that may consist of thirty to forty pupils depending on the area and school. In smaller classes, fewer students per teacher allow more teaching time to be devoted to each pupil (Mosteller et al. 1996; Dobbelsteen et al. 2002). Often the acoustics in the classroom are poor contributing to the noise level caused by the chatter of children working in groups. Teachers may resort to shouting to get students' attention or to be heard over the noise when frontal teaching or giving directions are required.

Israeli children as a social group tend to be talkative, energetic and independent risk-takers within the class. They will often interrupt their teachers to ask questions or

make comments without waiting their turn. This impulsiveness and impatience is indicative of Israeli society as a whole and is evident in other spheres as well as in schools. Often children are given a great deal of freedom at home that carries over into the classroom where children are efficacious and emboldened to try to behave as they please. The parents in this study viewed public school teachers' inability to maintain their perceptions of firm discipline as one of the major faults of public schools pushing them to opt out of the system.

5.2.3.4 Clash of cultural values

A major push factor away from public schools articulated by interviewees was a discord between their cultural and ethical values and those being taught implicitly at public schools. Some of the Russian speaking parents felt that their children were treated in a disrespectful manner by other Israeli children due to their cultural differences, their Russian origins and accents. Most of the Russian parents found that children at public schools exhibited behaviours of which they disapproved. If these behaviours were representative of Israeli children then they were not keen on their own children acquiring them through exposure. Russian immigrants to Israel tend to take great pride in their home language and literature (Remennick, 2004). They are anxious to see that their language and values are maintained. However, this presents them with a dilemma. On the whole, all the parents interviewed for the study desired their children to develop a sense of 'Israeliness' as long as that connection to Israeli society did not conflict in any form with their own personal values. Yet they were separating their children from the place where they were most apt to develop a sense of an Israeli ethos, the public school system. Their feelings about being Israeli were bifurcated. They had chosen to make Israel their home yet they found it challenging, if not impossible to accept the Israeli manner of living. Not all Israeli parents who suffered a clash of values were recent immigrants. Even native-born Israeli parents disapproved of many of the traits that seemed to characterize Israeli society inherent in local schools. The majority of native Hebrew speaking parents had attended post-graduate studies abroad, mainly in English language environments. Their exposure to other cultures may have modified their own value systems. Other Israeli parents maintained that the present culture exemplified in public schools was incongruent with their own home values that had been instilled in them during their childhoods.

Culture defined by Bulman (2004) and referred to in Chapter 2 comprises the tools we use to view and understand the world. These views are developed during childhood through family and school experiences, and are influenced by social mores and religious beliefs (Fennes & Hapgood, 1997). When immigrants settle in a new country, they bring their cultural beliefs with them. These beliefs define what they consider to be proper or correct behaviours, which may conflict with the surrounding environment (Cropley, 1983). Newcomers must superimpose their values on a host society that 'has its own values, customs, habits and norms' (Cropley, 1983:40). These habits and norms constitute rules of dress, eating habits, educational expectations and the aspirations and beliefs of what constitutes 'a good person' (Cropley, 1983:40). Cropley contends that the immigrants are absorbed into a host society when they are able to find a compromise between their own norms and those of the receiving society' (Cropley, 1983). A difficulty arises when the standards they have learned in their original culture are deemed inappropriate or are rejected by the receiving culture (Cropley, 1983). Because values and beliefs constitute a stabilizing influence for its members, it is difficult or impossible to abandon them totally and accept new values. Thus, it becomes extremely difficult for newcomers to adjust to the host society without emotional conflicts. A dissonance develops between the immigrants' home values and those in the receiving society. The norms that have ordered their world and have made it understandable no longer exist and a strange new set of rules must be learned (Cropley, 1983). Cropley posits that people who are familiar with the values of a society need to expend less energy during their daily lives and consequently, suffer less stress (Cropley, 1983). A familiarity with accepted social mores contributes to the development of a sense of belonging. Immigrants who are unfamiliar with local norms become overly sensitive to unimportant cues that make the receiving society difficult to understand and their own behaviours difficult to read by the new society (Cropley, 1983). Cultural dissonance becomes exceedingly noticeable in schools. As Cropley states: 'a particular problem for immigrant children is what they learn at home and what they learn in the society at large may fit poorly together, or may even be contradictory' (Cropley, 1983:49).

In order to alleviate the cultural discordance caused by value conflicts, new immigrants to a country tend to live near and associate with people who have originated from their countries of origin or speak a common language. They possess

a group identity, what Cohen (2004: 87) terms 'ethnic identity' and share common purposes and goals. These ethnic groups guide people's beliefs and behaviours. Russian speakers in Israel today comprise approximately one million individuals or twenty percent of the total Jewish population. This substantial number of Russian speaking newcomers has allowed for the formation of an 'autonomous community' with its own economic, social and political infrastructure (Remennick, 2004: 432). Thus, learning Hebrew, the language of the receiving society is not an immediate necessity but is considered imperative for smooth absorption into Israeli society (Remennick, 2004).

Language and identity are inextricably entwined (Joseph, 2004); the manner in which cultural beliefs and goals are expressed is through language. It has been noted in research (Remennick, 2004) that Russian speakers in Israel tend to cherish their language and heritage and withstand attempts at enculturation. They resist assimilating the values and practices of Israeli society into their private lives. In Remennick's study (2004), participants perceived Russian as the chief receptacle of cultural traditions. English was also identified as an important language of international communication and significant for economic and occupational advancement in Israel and abroad. Many of the local immigrant parents who participated in the study at WBAIS were not proficient in the language of the outer environment (Hebrew) yet oral proficiency in Hebrew is a prime indicator of social integration among Russian immigrants (Remennick, 2004). Children are the major instruments of transference of local influence to their parents through contact with Hebrew speaking friends at school and through local cultural products (Remennick, 2004). By divorcing their children from association with Israeli children at local schools, Russian speaking Israeli parents at WBAIS have placed obstacles in the way of their enculturation process but are willing to do so to preserve their own values. These Russian speaking parents appeared to be experiencing the cultural dissonance precipitated by the clash of their home values and those found in the receiving society, exemplified in the public school sector.

It is possible for locally-born parents to experience a similar kind of stress brought about by a disparity between their own values inculcated during their upbringing and those represented in Israeli schools at present. The way societies sustain value

patterns is through education, in the home environment and at school. Longstreet (1978) postulates that children are inculcated with ethnically learned behaviours before they have sufficient intellectual awareness to make judgements. Students encounter the public school system, its bureaucracy and traditions when they are able to judge their quality. Modes of communication, acceptable relationships between students, teachers and administrators, praiseworthy attitudes, rewards and punishments are presented to children who do not yet have the intellectual power or the sociological perspective to reject them (Longstreet, 1978). A problem arises when parents determine that the cultural beliefs and attitudes a child learns in school conflict with their own home beliefs. The parents in this study, therefore, determined that they needed to find a school more harmonious with their cultural and social tenets.

5.2.3.5 Lack of a rigorous and challenging curriculum

In the survey, thirty-seven to forty-one respondents out of the fifty-one parents acknowledged that a rigorous academic program and high academic standards were reasons for choosing WBAIS for their children. During personal interviews, parents expanded on the area of curriculum and on their misgivings or disappointments about the subjects presented to their children during their Israeli public school experiences. Native Hebrew speakers objected to the amount of emphasis placed on subjects and skills they considered unimportant to the detriment of other areas considered essential as reading and writing. They wanted a more internationally minded curriculum rather than one focused mainly on a Jewish or Israeli context. The humanities were not given enough emphasis according to parents while math instruction and science instruction had deteriorated over the years. This dissatisfaction with the curriculum again reflected the public school's discordance with parents' cultural and home values. Parents' conceptions of what constituted a challenging and rigorous curriculum were not in line with that being offered at public schools. A political purpose of policy makers who create national curricula is to assist in the creation of patriotic feelings of belonging to a nation-state among the young citizens of the country, to consolidate a national identity (Moscow Ministry of Education, 1996). It is particularly imperative in a country like Israel that is comprised mainly of newly arrived or former immigrants. The interviewees, however, especially the native Hebrew speakers were vocal in their disagreement over the content of Israel's national

curriculum. They preferred their children to acquire skills that would facilitate a sense of being world citizens. It appears that these parents have moved beyond nation-state building to the idea that it is far more important for their children to have a conception of their place in a globally minded society.

5.2.3.6 Overlarge classes

Concerns about the size of Israeli public school classes represented a recurring theme in the interviews and in the survey among Israeli parents of children ages five to eighteen. The desire for small classes received thirty-one responses from all Israeli parents and was first in rank as a reason for choosing the school when all school choice factors were calculated. All of the parents interviewed, no matter what their country of origin and cultural affiliation, felt that their children could not receive adequate attention in classes averaging thirty to forty students. Parents reported that some public school teachers appeared not to know their children at all, did not seem to understand their children's strengths and weaknesses and had little knowledge of their individual personalities. They attributed the large class populations as being the main contributing factor to teachers' failures in becoming familiarized with their students' distinct needs. It is certainly more difficult to attend to students' individual needs when there are forty individuals with varying capabilities, especially when those forty students are extremely energetic, impulsive or have difficulty remaining still for any length of time. Class management issues take more time as do transitions and attention to behavioural concerns. Teachers also do not have enough time to develop teacher-student relationships as they would in smaller classes. Small classes have been cited in literature (Strecher et al. 2003; Blatchford et al. 2003; Dobbeltstein et al. 2002; Mosteller et al. 1996) as a characteristic of efficient and effective schools, especially in the area of increased student-teacher interaction, expanded depth of the teachers' knowledge about the children and increased sensitivity to individual student needs. One Russian father summed up the inadequacies of Israeli public schools in a concise comment. He believed that there was not enough information taught (a poor curriculum), classes were not serious enough (lack of discipline) and groups were too large for one teacher. *'There is not enough teaching and all the time mess!'*

5.2.3.7 Special needs not being met

Clearly parents were voicing the same concerns summed up in the Dovrat study (Ministry of Education, 2005); the Israeli educational system suffered from a lack of well-trained and dedicated teachers who had the capabilities and the know-how to attend to the individual academic and emotional needs of students. Many of the parents in the study voiced their misgivings that Israeli teachers and administrators were not sufficiently attentive, did not concern themselves with their child's emotional needs and were not willing to listen to suggestions from parents about addressing those needs. Some children had been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, had additional special educational issues or other emotional requirements. The Israeli parent participants believed that teachers were often indifferent to parental views or felt threatened by what they considered to be parental interference in educational matters. Parental concerns were justified in their individual cases. Many Israeli teachers have little experience with strategies for SEN students since few classes in SEN are included in teacher training programs. Teachers must make an individual effort to become informed about learning strategies for special students. Professional growth is offered in this area at Israeli universities and colleges but teachers are not required to attend. The Israeli parents with SEN students who were interviewed for this study were adamant in the belief that a happy and caring atmosphere was imperative for their students, although a high level academic curriculum and a firm but pleasant environment was deemed important. Their children needed to feel supported and appreciated by their peers as well as by their teachers and they needed to receive additional academic support.

5.2.3.8 My child was not happy in the Israeli school

The happiness of the child in school was cited as a strong reason for choosing WBAIS in the survey data and was articulated at length by parents during personal interviews, especially by parents of children who had particular educational needs. Parents believed 'happiness' was exemplified in their children's pleasure and excitement about going to the international school each Monday, in their children's disappointment when holidays prevented them from attending school and their children's willingness to participate in school activities. Parents related how their children's self-confidence had flourished since attending the international school. According to parents, their children previously had had little motivation to attend public schools and some had

even dreaded going to class. They had feared bullying by students and insensitive and unkind remarks by teachers. The atmosphere at public schools was not conducive to building their children's self-esteem. Coldron and Boulton (1991) found a child's happiness at school of paramount concern to parents in their study. Happiness could be attained through security criteria. By security the researchers referred to the sense of security a child would receive in a caring but stable classroom atmosphere. The parents in Coldron and Boulton's study (1991) were convinced that children were happier in an environment where firm but fair discipline existed. This seems to be the case among the parents interviewed for this study. Students were unhappy at their local schools where discipline seemed non-existent, where special needs were not accommodated to the extent parents desired and where parents and students perceived that they were not treated respectfully and were victims of malicious activities. Israeli parents determined that their children with special educational needs could not reach their full potential in the public school environment, specifically since classes were excessively large, programs for children with special needs did not always exist and teachers were not sufficiently trained in SEN strategies to make necessary accommodations. Bagley et al (2001) found that a child's unhappiness and potential happiness were decisive push and pull factors for rejecting one school and choosing another for parents of children with special needs. Insensitivity to special education needs was a crucial determinant for rejecting a particular school. Previous parental perceptions of the mishandling of a child's specific requirements served to reinforce parental commitments to find a suitable educational institution that had the capability of meeting their individual needs (Bagley et al, 2001). Before making enrolment decisions, parents (Bagley et al 2001) ascertained if school facilities were available and were appropriate for their children. Although parents wanted their children to succeed academically, a pleasant caring environment in which their children could flourish socially and emotionally was a more important requirement for parents of special needs children.

5.3 Summary of push factors

Israeli parents at WBAIS interviewed for this study considered the major inadequacies of the Israeli public school system to be overlarge classes, non-existent discipline during lessons and at recesses, an apparent culture of violence, a weak and ineffectual curriculum, under trained and insensitive educators and a school

environment espousing values inconsistent with home tenets. These characteristics of public schools described by parents served as dominant factors pushing them away from local schools and influencing them to seek alternatives educational solutions for their children. A child's unhappiness in school exerted a potent influence on parental actions. Research question 2 explores the characteristics of WBAIS that attracted local parents and served to pull them towards enrolling their children at the school. Potential push factors of the international school will also be discussed.

5.4 What are the attributes of the international school that influenced parental decisions to enrol their children in that school?

The pull factors parents cited for choosing WBAIS for their children were the antithesis of those pushing them from the public school system. Yet parents did not make their decisions lightly. Some parents agonized over the possible consequences of their choices and thoroughly investigated other alternatives while others exhibited confidence that they had made the best possible choice given the alternatives available to them at the time.

5.4.1 The school choice decision-making process

Although the initial impulses to remove their children from the local system may have been reactions to emotionally unpleasant experiences, most parents used the processes embedded in Rational Choice Theory by carefully contemplating the benefits that would be attained by enrolment at WBAIS balanced against the perceived costs that would be incurred, both financial and emotional. In order to weigh the benefits and costs of the school, parents needed to be informed about its attributes. Part I of the survey explored how parents received facts about the school before making their decisions. Parents were asked about their sources of data. Forty-two of the respondents had heard about the school through networking with friends, family, and colleagues at work, parents of students presently studying at WBAIS and from former students. Eight parents signified that they had checked the school's website and five had heard about the school through newspaper articles and advertisements. Five parents cited general knowledge as their way of learning about the school, two could not remember how they had received information, and the school had been recommended to one parent by an outside organization. Another parent was an

alumnus of the school and one a staff member. Most respondents had used multiple sources of information. Only one parent acknowledged finding out about the school through its prospectus. The inefficiency of the school prospectus as a major source of information corresponds to research by Headington & Howson (1995) that questions the effectiveness of the school prospectus as a marketing and informational tool. Stressed parents frequently choose schools recommended by family and friends rather than from first-hand experiences (Holmes, 2002; Teelken, 1999; Hughes et al 1994).

Upon receiving information from a myriad of sources or after recommendations from family and friends, parents had to consider the costs of sending their children to an international school as well as its perceived benefits. Not all costs were financial, although the high fees did represent a considerable expenditure. Additional costs were in the cultural, social/emotional and language spheres. Parents had to consider whether the values embodied in the school's philosophy corresponded to or were compatible with their own. They also had to consider the social/emotional cost of separating their children from other Israeli children and the rest of the local community. A major cost to the Israeli child in an international school is the potential loss of Hebrew language fluency, especially in literacy areas. Children's progress in Hebrew language acquisition would slow or cease altogether, and a deterioration of their present language knowledge would occur if parents were not diligent about providing their children with home language instruction. Parents had used the processes of Rational Choice Theory in deliberating if the benefits/pull factors of their child's attendance at an international school would far outweigh the potential cultural, social/emotional and language costs (push factors). Although many of the parents who had participated in the interviews agonized about these anticipated drawbacks of an international school education while living in their own country, they eventually concluded that a high quality, private school education was so essential for their children that they were willing to absorb the expected disadvantages.

5.4.2 The pull factors / benefits

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to list the five statements that they considered to be most relevant and important in their decision-making processes when choosing WBAIS. While their choices were varied, certain statements were considered significant.

5.4.2.1 The importance of learning English

Among parents in all three schools the desire for their children to learn English was designated as their most important determinant or was second or third in rank order. Among high school parents, the desire for their children to learn English was superseded only by the desire for their children to have an international education. For these local parents, studying in English was synonymous with acquiring English since they surmised that a curriculum in English would demand that their children learn the language to a proficient degree. Cummins (1979) called the level of English needed for high-level classroom discussions and interactions Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALPS). He defined CALPS as the level of cognitively demanding language that is necessary for the comprehension of and response to academic level texts. Some of the high school parents who wrote in a statement 41 at the end of the survey commented on the need for their children to continue studying in English since they had just returned from living abroad, and their children had already begun their school studies in English language settings. Elementary and middle school parents overwhelmingly chose the desire for their children to learn English as their most paramount priority in their responses to the survey. It is interesting to note that during the interviews, the same degree of importance for their children to learn English or learn in English did not surface as a major determinant in their school choice deliberations for most of the interviewees. Only one parent actually spoke freely about the importance of English as a reason for choosing WBAIS without being queried about its relevance. She was the Arab-Israeli parent who believed that a solid grounding in the English language would open endless possibilities for her children's future in Israel and abroad. With a firm knowledge of English her children would be able to attend tertiary educational institutions in many countries around the world and would give them the tools to excel in global business. Her views corresponded to responses Potter and Hayden, (2004) elicited from Argentinean parents that a high level of English fluency afforded children an advantage since English was viewed as the language of international communication and global interaction. An education providing fluency in English is often regarded as social capital and a long-term investment in their children's futures (Potter & Hayden, 2004).

Most of the other interviewees considered the acquisition of English language knowledge to an academic level to be an added side benefit of an international school education. When probed about the importance of English, parents affirmed that fluency in the language was a significant advantage but not their main reason for enrolling their children at the school. Here their views differed from the survey results which showed the desire for their children to learn English as the prime school choice motivator. They were more concerned about finding an educational institution that suited their children's individual needs. A native Israeli mother commented, however, that if the language of instruction at WBAIS had been a language other than English, she would not have enrolled her children there. The fact that her children would be learning English to a high level was a strong pull towards the school. Another mother had considered a French language school for her daughter but had rejected the idea since she did not care for the French system of education. All the parents interviewed for this study acknowledged that a firm knowledge of the English language would provide their children with an advantage in life. A similar feeling was elicited from local Swiss elementary parents in Mackenzie et al (2003). Swiss parents of elementary-aged children were unique in not listing the importance of an English language education as their top priority (Mackenzie et al 2003) but considered it an important benefit.

5.4.2.2 Private schools are better than public

Many of the parents had responded to the statements in the survey that they believed private schools offered a more effective education (23 responses) and private schools are better than public schools (21 responses). Some parents elaborated on these statements during the course of the personal interviews. Russian speaking parents were particularly vocal on the subject of public versus private education. Parents expressed their beliefs that private schools could better offer their children the attention they needed since classes were much smaller than in local schools. One parent was not overly negative about public education but explained that in his opinion, not every teacher in Israeli public schools believed in putting students first. He expounded his views that the difference between WBAIS and Israeli public schools simply amounted to the difference between private and non-private institutions. Private schools could hire the best teachers from the teaching profession since they could afford to pay higher salaries. They could be more selective in the

enrolment process, selecting higher achieving students. This parent reiterated that since classes at private schools tended to be smaller and teachers better trained than in public schools, teachers at private schools were better able to pay individualized attention to each student. He saw the most important difference between public and private schools as the size of classes. In Israeli public schools all children must be accepted so classes tended to be large.

A Russian speaking father, who was a teacher in the Israeli public school system, explained that in the former Soviet Union, people had no opportunity to exert school choice decisions for their children. All students were required to attend public schools since private schools were non-existent, except for a handful of international schools. Now that he lived in a Western country, he was appreciative of having an opportunity to choose the school his child would attend, and he was grateful to be financially able to pay the tuition fees. Under the old Soviet regime public school education had been considered efficient and successful, producing an exceptionally high literacy rate (Kerr, 1995). In the 1980's however, teacher preparation and quality had begun to decline. Teachers were perceived as authoritarian and cruel and parents had to cope with the psychological damage they inflicted upon students (Kerr, 1995). After Perestroika and the break-up of the Soviet Union, philosophies of education started changing. Teachers were encouraged to innovate and adopt new methodologies and to place the needs of the child first above conformity and ideology (Kerr, 1995). Private schools charging tuition levies began to appear along with experimental programs; however, expanding poverty overwhelmed the educational system. Teachers today are paid low salaries and the quality of educators has declined (Kerr, 1995). Parents in this study who had experienced the Soviet authoritarian system of education were intent on giving their children another kind of educational atmosphere, one in which the child was considered of utmost importance but which also provided a solid curriculum taught by firm but concerned teachers. One Russian mother was so adamant about keeping her daughter out of the public system she declared that if her daughter could not continue studying at WBAIS for whatever reason, she would send her away to a private boarding school in Switzerland.

5.4.2.3 Small classes resulted in individualized attention

'I like the small classes at WBAIS' was chosen as one of the most influential reasons for choosing the school by local parents in elementary and middle schools but was not a priority for parents of high school aged children. It is intriguing to note that elementary parents did not choose it as one of their top five priorities. Instead, elementary parents chose 'I wanted my children to be happy in school' which came below the desire for their children to learn English and the desire for their children to have an international education in rank order. However, in interviews elementary parents designated small classes as an essential attribute of WBAIS. Parents regarded small classes as a desirable environment to provide teachers with individualized instructional opportunities. By providing individualized instruction, a pleasant atmosphere would be created in which teachers would be able to attend to the specific needs of the students efficiently and on a regular basis. There is a widely held belief among parents who choose private schools that private schools are more capable of presenting individualized instruction that is more conducive to the needs of their stakeholders owing to their small size classes (Holme, 2002; Wenglinsky, 2002; Glass, 1997).

5.4.2.4 A rigorous curriculum

Elementary parents perceived the curriculum at WBAIS as being academically challenging and chose a rigorous academic program as one of their five most influential reasons for choosing the school. In interviews, parents clarified their feelings about the importance of a challenging, well-organized academic program that concentrated on areas that could provide their children with life skills. Parents appreciated the manner in which core subjects were taught and were pleased with the emphasis on the teaching of humanities, in particular literature, art and music. They believed that the subjects taught at WBAIS were more useful for their children's futures than those offered at local schools. As mentioned in the discussion of Research Question 1, parents particularly objected to the emphasis on Bible study in the Israeli national school curriculum. Constant feedback from teachers about student progress was an additional trait that parents appreciated about the school. Many interview participants related how approachable teachers and administrators were for parents and how they were willing to discuss parental concerns at any time. Parents felt their opinions were respected and they liked the manner in which they were

encouraged to take an active part in their children's education. A challenging curriculum and sensitivity to the cultural beliefs and expectations of stakeholders has been cited in research (Wenglinsky, 2002; Fertig, 2000; Tama, 1989; Blanford & Shaw, 2000; Fertig, 2000; Swick, 1992) as characteristics of effective school programs.

5.4.2.5 A firm but caring atmosphere

'Teachers seemed to be caring' was a statement named by elementary and high school parents in the survey as one of the five most important reasons for choosing WBAIS. Parents appreciated the orderly atmosphere during lessons and during recesses. One parent remarked how impressed she had been when she saw students quietly queuing to go from one classroom to the next. She appreciated the way students interacted in a respectful manner with teachers and peers. Students appeared to treat each other in a kindly manner. As alluded to in the discussion of Research Question 1, the happiness/unhappiness of the child was considered a paramount concern and a decisive reason parents rejected public schools in favour of private schools, notably for parents of SEN children (Potter & Hayden 2004; Coldron & Boulton, 1991). Local parents were careful about finding a friendly, protective, sympathetic and compassionate school environment; they believed WBAIS embodied these attributes. They presumed that the school displayed these traits due to its highly qualified and caring staff of teachers and administrators. Parents perceived WBAIS as child-centred; the primary concern of teachers and staff was the welfare of the child.

5.4.2.6 An international / multicultural student population

Local parents in all three schools responded when asked at the end of the survey to record their five most important reasons for choosing WBAIS that they wanted their children to have an international education. Parents in high school chose this reason as their primary priority. In the interviews when parents were asked to expand upon the notion of the advantages of the school, parents commented that a diverse student body was desirable since it exposed their children to many varying cultures. The opportunity to make friends from around the world was seen as advantageous to their child's emotional development. Children learned to tolerate difference and to interact with children of various races. While parents appreciated the multiculturalism of the school population, not one parent spoke about an international curriculum as being an

important reason for choosing the school. It became apparent that parents had confused an international education with multiculturalism. WBAIS does not present an 'international' curriculum; it embodies the characteristics of an American-style curriculum by presenting subjects that are normally taught in American national schools. Some local parents responded in the survey that they wanted their children to have an American-style education in order to be qualified and be accepted into North American universities. Local parents seemed to value traits of WBAIS because it embodied the attributes cited by McKenzie (1998) as characteristic of what parents perceive to be international; that is, an education encouraging open-mindedness, individual and cultural self-esteem, tolerance for diversity, and a passion for learning.

5.4.3 Costs / potential push factors

The perceived and real costs of an international school education constituted potential push factors away from the school. While most parents felt they really had no alternative, these costs represented considerable parental anxieties in the financial, social/emotional and cultural spheres.

5.4.3.1 Financial costs

Parents viewed the high yearly tuition payments as an exorbitant but necessary 'cost' of giving their children a solid education. The tuition at WBAIS equals or often exceeds fees at local private colleges and state-supported universities. Although parents regarded tuition levies as a significant drawback of their children's attendance at WBAIS, most felt they were investing their money wisely in their children's futures.

5.4.3.2 Social / emotional costs

An additional 'cost' mentioned repeatedly by parents in the interviews was the toll an international school education had on the social opportunities afforded their children after school hours. Many Hebrew speaking parents in particular reminisced about their friendships maintained since childhood years; they were aware that attendance at an international school would severely hamper their own children's abilities to make lasting friendships. Some parents remarked about the differences in attitudes held by them and other international parents when trying to arrange after-school playtimes for their children. One mother felt she had the burden of transporting children to her

house and back to their own homes in order to allow her child to pursue and maintain his social connections after school since other parents did not seem willing to take on transportation responsibilities. Other parents felt that social outings for their children were difficult due to the considerable distance between their homes and those of their children's friends. Parents reported that many of the children who had made friends in the neighbourhood or at their local schools had severed these ties. Often the respondents' own children felt they no longer belonged to the Israeli social group or that the local community children no longer considered them part of the accepted crowd.

5.4.3.3 Language costs

Parents mentioned a further 'cost' of international school attendance as the difficulty in maintaining their children's Hebrew language proficiency level, especially in literacy areas. The Hebrew speaking parents participating in the study had tried instituting their own Hebrew language school after study hours but had been unable to keep the momentum of the classes going. Many language groups at WBAIS do run their own home language lessons, either on school premises or at their embassies. The school does not sponsor home language classes since there are not enough students and too many languages to offer maintenance classes for all language groups. Although Hebrew classes are offered to students, Hebrew study is required only during third grade and is offered as an elective in other grades. Parents expressed misgivings that the level was not sufficiently rigorous for Hebrew language maintenance since it is presented as a foreign language and is only offered every other day for one period. If the future demanded that their children return to local schools especially when they reach high school age, parents feared their children would not be proficient enough in the Hebrew language to succeed academically in Israeli high schools.

5.4.3.4 Cultural costs

Tied to the fear of Hebrew language loss was a final 'cost' brought up by parents in the interviews. This was a concern that their children would lose or be confused about their sense of national or group identity. Parents expressed concern that their children would not identify with Israeli society and would feel estranged in their own country. This fear was most prominent among Hebrew speaking parents but was also

mentioned by other language speakers. While parents did not approve of all aspects of Israeli culture, they still wanted their children to have a connection with their roots and with the outside community.

According to Delanty (1996) identity suggests an acceptance of common ties. Delanty identifies two types of national identity, civic nationalism and ethno-cultural nationalism (Delanty, 1996: 3). Civic nationalism refers to membership within a particular political community while ethno-cultural nationalism refers to membership in a cultural historical community. Delanty sees the predominant form of national identity taking form in multicultural societies like Israel as the latter. Ethno-cultural identity is concerned with preserving cultural differences, not denying them (Delanty, 1996:3). Identities, whether group or individual, are socially constructed through life experiences (Joseph, 2004). A child's ethos is developed through social practices within the context of a worldview; that world of experience is expressed through language and must be understood in the context of language (Joseph, 2004). One forms strong impressions of others from manners of speech. Language plays a prominent role in the transference of cultural traditions and beliefs, thus national identities have been strongly associated with national languages (Joseph, 2004). While national languages shape national identities the reverse is also true; national identities may shape national languages. The potential loss of the national language for local students may have a detrimental effect on their feelings of closeness to their country of citizenship and the development of a community ethos.

However, knowledge of a language does not necessarily mean that a culture will be automatically spread to the people learning the language. Joseph explains that the language being learned must be embedded within a surrounding culture:

The language must be embedded within the cultural habitus in order to function as the vehicle in which the culture will be acquired. Transferred to a different habitus, the language will mould itself to that habitus rather than the other way round (Joseph, 2004: 167).

Children who learn Hebrew as a foreign language at WBAIS do not necessarily acquire cultural attitudes and beliefs as they would if they were learning within the habitus of the outside community. Joseph's borrows Bordieu's (1991) term 'habitus'

to refer to those aspects of culture; the particular systems, opinions, outlooks and mannerisms embodied in social interactions that connect people to particular groups. Joseph expounds that shared beliefs arise when the 'practices around which the community is formed enter into the habitus of the individual community members' (Joseph, 2004: 220). The development of a community of practice arises most strongly when individuals are raised 'performing the practices as part of their everyday routine' (Joseph, 2004: 220).

Education performs a crucial function in the reproduction of social views and traditions within a shared habitus. In local schools students are inculcated with accepted group beliefs through the study of holidays, folk stories and national history and the daily activities composing their school lives. Even though their parents may originate from many countries around the world, Israeli students learn the accepted norms of behaviour within their communities; they feel connected to their history. Local students who come to WBAIS may arrive with a connection to their community, especially those from native Hebrew speaking families, but after several years they begin to question who they are. Are they Israeli, Russian, Arab or American? In essence, they are becoming international but no longer feel a sense of belonging to the country in which they live and hold citizenship since their education is taking place in another cultural habitus expressed through the use of the English language. The traditions, beliefs, behaviours and outlook transferred through the curriculum and language of instruction are largely American. It is a phenomenon that has occurred with internationally mobile students who have been called 'Third Culture Kids' (Pollack & Van Reken, 1999). While local parents at WBAIS do not always agree with the beliefs of the cultural habitus, a dilemma arises when their children are removed from local schools and enrolled at an international school representing a divergent cultural habitus. Local citizen children and their parents represent a 'fourth constituency' at international schools; Hanchanlash (2004) calls local citizen children 'Fourth Culture Kids'. These children grow up in their countries of citizenship but attend international schools espousing foreign, usually Western cultural values. The result is a degree of alienation that arises among children of the 'fourth constituency' towards their home cultures. Hanchanlash (2004) espouses the belief that parents constitute the most important link between 'Fourth Culture Kids' and their own native cultures. Another significant link is the importance of the

maintenance of literacy skills at a high level in their mother tongue since it is the 'instrument of communication and understanding' (Hanchanlash, 2004: 13) within their home culture. Israeli citizen parents at WBAIS desire their children to feel 'Israeli' yet have removed them from the place where they would absorb Israeli beliefs and traditions most easily. While internationally mobile children or 'Third Culture Kids' (Pollack and Van Reken, 1999) may rarely spend time in their country of birth or citizenship, local children at WBAIS tend to feel like strangers in their own land. They are caught between cultures, the culture of the school, the culture of the home and the culture of the outside community. The problem for parents is how to establish a community ethos or to assure and maintain their child's connection with their local community.

5.5 Summary

Question 2 explored parental ideas about the attributes of WBAIS that served as pull factors towards enrolment at the school. An overview of parents' deliberations and the processes they employed in choosing a school were presented in relation to Rational Choice Theory by which parents weighed the perceived benefits and costs of their school choice decisions. Parents considered the attributes that attracted them to WBAIS as being the benefits or pull factors of an education in an international school: small size classes, the individualized attention paid to students' needs, a rigorous and relevant English language curriculum, an environment espousing firm but fair discipline, a highly qualified and caring staff and a multi-national student population. Perceived costs or potential push factors included the substantial tuition fees, the lack of a social life for local children after school hours; the difficulty local children have in maintaining lasting friendships, a feeling of disconnection from Israeli society that children develop and the difficulty most of the parents face in maintaining their children's level of Hebrew language proficiency. While parents had many concerns about the effect an education in an international school like WBAIS might have on their children's social life and feelings of belonging to Israeli society, they felt the benefits of a solid education that could be attained at a private international school far outweighed the costs. In light of the implications discussed in this chapter, Chapter 6 will present recommendations for the initiation of programs to address the needs of local parents and students at WBAIS and will offer suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

6.1 Discussion

This case study addressed two research questions exploring factors precipitating parents to reject local public schools and the attributes of an international school that contributed to increased local enrolment. Elementary and middle school parents served as its focus. Unlike parents of high school aged children, parents of younger children had many years left before decisions about university attendance needed to be made. It became evident from parents' responses during personal interviews that most of the respondents were opting out of the public school system rather than choosing the international school because of its American or international character. Parents perceived the public school system as being in a state of decline and that local schools were not meeting their children's educational, social and emotional needs. A discrepancy existed between the values embodied in the curriculum taught at local schools, in the behaviours exemplified in daily activities and in those held by local parents, both native born and newcomers. This clash of values precipitated a cultural dissonance resulting in displeasure with local schools.

Israeli born parents believed that their children would benefit more from a broad life skills-based curriculum that would better prepare their children for interaction within a global community than from a curriculum concentrating on Israeli and Jewish subjects. Contact with multinational students and a firm knowledge of English would offer their children better opportunities within a global marketplace in the future. They seemed to have moved beyond the need for a curriculum whose purpose was to build a sense of loyalty and encourage feelings of patriotism towards a nation-state. This does not mean, however, that parents did not want their children to develop or maintain a connection to Israeli society. A fear that an international school education might confuse their children's sense of belonging and identity was present. Parents expressed a conviction that they would do whatever was necessary for their children to maintain some contact with Israeli society through maintenance of the Hebrew language, through encouraging new friendships with Israeli children or maintaining existing ones.

Many Russian speaking parents believed that private schools were superior to public schools. They perceived private schools as being better than public since private schools could be selective in their enrolment policies, had smaller classes than public, and had better qualified teachers who maintained firm discipline in their classes. Russian speaking parents were pleased that they could choose a private school for their children since that had not been a possibility in the former Soviet Union.

Parents did not make their decisions lightly although some emotionally charged incidences might have added to feelings that a change of school was in order. Most parents thoughtfully contemplated the financial, social, cultural, language and emotional costs of removing their children from the public school system, the place where their children would best develop a sense of belonging to a community and Israeli society, compared to the benefits they believed their children would receive from a private American international school. Using the processes embodied in Rational Choice Theory, parents ascertained that the rewards their children would receive from a private school education far outweighed the costs that would be incurred. When applied to human concerns, using rational choice in the decision-making process cannot be as clear-cut as it is in contemplating the purchase of a material object. Emotional issues come into play, but that does not mean that people do not carefully consider their options when reflecting upon the advantages and disadvantages that may result from their choices.

6.2 Recommendations

Local parents who opt to enrol their children at international schools have made an arduous decision engendering great financial, social and cultural costs. In order to maximise the benefits local families gain from their enrolment decisions and minimise the costs, the school could initiate helpful programs and activities. These programs would assist local parents and students adjust to the culture of WBAIS while maintaining their identification with their nation/community. The following are suggestions for new programs at WBAIS:

1. The formation of monthly or bi-monthly focus/support groups would allow concerned local citizen parents the opportunity to discuss issues specifically related to their children's particular needs. Issues involving social connections, transportation difficulties, maintaining contact with neighbourhood friends and after-school social meetings may be examined and group suggestions put forth. It would also facilitate contact and possible friendships with other Israeli parents who share the same concerns.
2. Hebrew classes for Israeli citizen students need to be upgraded for language maintenance. Hebrew language classes should be mandatory for Israeli students and should meet on a daily basis for one period or every other day for one full block (80 minutes) as English to Speakers of Other Language classes are held. Classes must include advanced Hebrew language skills in literacy areas; lessons must be on a native speaker level. Students may be eligible to study an additional language after two or three years of study at WBAIS when their English and Hebrew language skills have reached a high level of proficiency for their grade level. In addition to Hebrew skills acquisition, classes must include lessons on Israeli history, holidays and traditions. The Hebrew language is local students' primary link with Israeli society and should be maintained at a high level of proficiency.
3. A Hebrew club could be formed to assist local students in meeting other Israeli students at the school and to maintain contacts with the outside community. Activities may involve service projects within the local community, field trips to museums and other places of historical interest, contacts and visits with Israeli public schools, pen pal connections and social gatherings involving Israeli students from the outside community. The Hebrew club could be open to all interested students who are studying Hebrew, not only locals but Israeli students should be strongly encouraged to join. Meetings may be held during the school day or as part of the after-school activity program so students are able assemble together on a regular and frequent basis. These joint facilities with local schools would enable students to maintain a link with Israeli society to order to maintain a sense of national identity.

4. Programs to foster more school-community contacts should be initiated.

McKenzie (2002) argues that the lack of salient contact between international schools and the host country community is a problem that international schools must rectify. The sole contact that many international schools have with the outside local community is through community service projects, mainly for middle and high schools students and these are not always mandatory. At WBAIS, efforts have been made in the high school to include local school students in sports competitions and the TIMEMUN (Model United Nations) Conference held yearly on campus premises. There has been minimal community contact within the elementary school and middle schools. Projects need to be initiated involving frequent and regular participation from neighbouring Israeli schools. Students can work together on projects to help save endangered indigenous animals or could volunteer to work together in animal shelters and in homes for the elderly. Contact with the local community could foster a sense of community ethos and national identification.

5. A non-academic/ vocational track in high school should be established along with the present academic track program to allow SEN students not capable of fulfilling the regular academic program the opportunity of finishing high school with a certificate of completion. At the present time local students who are considered incapable of completing the academic program in high school may be required to leave the school at the end of eighth grade, a natural transition period, and return to the Israeli system. They may have spent many years at WBAIS and may not have maintained their level of Hebrew sufficiently to succeed in a Hebrew language curriculum. If Israeli students are accepted for enrolment it is the school's ethical responsibility to provide educational programs for the individual needs of all students throughout school grades.

6.3 Suggestions for further research

This study involved a limited sampling of Israeli citizen parents at one international school in Israel that is located in the centre of the country. It would be compelling and informative to see if similar or dissimilar results would be attained if the research were to be repeated with new Israeli citizen parents at the school. Further research in the area of Israeli parental preferences and concerns could also be undertaken at the remaining church affiliated international schools in Israel to compare and contrast data and to contribute to the general body of knowledge about the 'Fourth Constituency' in international schools. These international schools are located in areas of the country where student populations are comprised largely of children from local Moslem and Christian Arab neighbourhoods. Their student bodies have a greater proportion of local resident citizens in relation to internationally mobile families. It would be intriguing to see if parental perceptions at these schools corresponded or differed to those at WBAIS since their Israeli citizens come from dissimilar cultural backgrounds or if they shared similarities with other local populations in international schools globally.

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APPENDIX A
Explanatory Letter to Parents

Aug. 30, 2005

Dear WBAIS Parents:

My name is Rosalyn Ezra and I am the English Language Learning Specialist (ELL) in the elementary school at WBAIS.

As part of my research project leading to a doctorate of education degree, I am looking into the area of school choice and local resident parental priorities. I would like to request your assistance in gaining information in this area. Please take

10 minutes to complete the attached questionnaire. All information will be kept anonymous and entirely confidential.

You will have access to all information gained from this study upon request. *The completed questionnaire may be returned to me by placing it in my post box in the faculty room or may be hand delivered to me in my classroom (room 40) by your child. Alternatively, you may place the questionnaire in the stamped envelope I have provided and mail it back to me.* I would like to thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.

Respectfully,

Rosalyn Ezra
English Language Learning Specialist
ELL Coordinator

APPENDIX B
Parent Survey

Please complete this questionnaire as accurately as possible.
The contents of this questionnaire will remain anonymous.

Section I:

Background Information

1. In which country were you born?

2. What is your nationality?

Israeli ☐

North American ☐

British ☐

Russian ☐

Other _____

Dual national: _____ and _____

3. What is your child(ren's) nationality?

4. Which language(s) do you speak at home with your children?

5. Where do you normally reside?

Israel ☐

Other ☐ _____

6. Have you had previous experience with an international school in another country?

No ☐

Yes ☐

If yes, which school? _____

For how long? _____

7. Is this your first experience with a private school in Israel?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If no, which one? _____

8. Before enrolling your child(ren) in WBAIS, did you consider any other schools?

Yes ☐

If yes, which one/s? _____

No ☐

9. In which academic year did your child(ren) enrol in WBAIS?

2004-5 ☐

2003-4 ☐

2002-3 ☐

2001-2 ☐

2000-1 ☐

Other _____

10. Present ages of child(ren)

1. _____ 2. _____

3. _____ 4. _____

11. How did you find out about WBAIS?

friends ☐

family members ☐

former students ☐

parents of students ☐

colleagues at work ☐

school website ☐

school prospectus ☐

newspaper ☐

other _____

Educational background: (optional)

12. What is your profession? _____

What type of school did you attend?

public ☐

private ☐

What is the highest educational degree you have attained? _____

Cultural affiliation: *(optional)*

To which cultural group do you feel you belong? _____

Section II:

Why did you decide to enrol your child(ren) in WBAIS?

Please put a check (✓) next to the numbered statement under the **Reason** column if the statement applies to you, or the **Not a Reason** column if the statement does not apply.

	Reason	Not a Reason
1) I wanted my child(ren) to learn English.		
2) I wanted my child(ren) to have an American-style education.		
3) I liked the small classes at WBAIS.		
4) The teachers are highly qualified.		
5) I wanted my child(ren) to have an international education.		
6) I was impressed with the school's facilities.		
7) WBAIS has a rigorous academic programme.		
8) The school is conveniently located.		
9) Private schools offer a better education.		
10) The staff seemed to be caring.		
11) I want my child(ren) to be able to enter a university in North America.		
12) WBAIS has high academic standards.		
13) The school has a special needs programme.		
14) I was impressed with the orderly classroom atmosphere.		
15) I wanted my child(ren) to be happy at school.		
16) I liked the multicultural mix of students.		
17) I attended an international school as a child.		
18) My child(ren) was (were) unhappy in the local school.		
19) The school has a well-established ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) programme.		
20) The WBAIS campus seemed safe and secure.		
21) I was impressed with the administrative staff.		
22) My child(ren) was (were) having difficulties in the local schools.		
23) The school offers a well-balanced curriculum.		
24) I liked the after-school activities programme.		
25) WBAIS is firm about discipline.		
26) The students seemed friendly.		
27) I liked the gardens and playground facilities.		
28) Friends / family recommended WBAIS.		
29) A private school offered a more effective education.		
30) We will be moving to another country in the near future.		
31) There is good support for less-able students at WBAIS.		
32) My child(ren) wanted to attend WBAIS.		
33) WBAIS is close to my home / place of work.		
34) I liked the kind of students at WBAIS.		
35) The teachers have high expectations for the students.		
36) The school offers a bus service to and from school.		
37) The school has the Advanced Placement Programme in high school.		
38) I liked the school's homework policy.		

39) The school has a Hebrew language / Israeli culture programme.		
40) Teachers seemed kind to their students.		

Please list the numbers of the 5 statements that were most influential when choosing WBAIS (in order of their importance).

Numbers:

I would like to interview parents to find out more information about why you chose WBAIS for your children. Parents will be contacted in advance to arrange a convenient time.

- ☐ I would be happy to participate in an interview at a future date.
- ☐ I do not want to be interviewed.

Please enter you name, contact address and telephone number below:

Name: _____

Address _____

Tel. _____

Thank you for your time and cooperation

APPENDIX C
Pilot Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. Have you lived your entire life in Israel?
2. If you attended local Israeli schools, how would you describe your own experiences in the Israeli school system?
3. Have your children ever attended Israeli schools? If so, which ones?
4. Why have you chosen to take your children out of the Israeli school system?
5. Have recent media reports about violence in the Israeli system affected your decision?
6. Why have you chosen WBAIS in particular?
7. How much input did your children have in the decision?
8. What do you see as the advantages at WBAIS?
9. Are there any disadvantages for local students at WBAIS?
10. Are you still happy with your decision? Why?